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CAN WE BELIEVE IN MIRACLES?

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CAN WE BELIEVE

IN

MIRACLES?

BY

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ANALYSIS OF ARGUMENT.

INTRODUCTION . . . . . pp. 3—26

The religion of the Bible is essentially a historical religion; so that to reject its history is to destroy the religion.

The history of the Bible is essentially a miraculous history; so that faith in its history, and faith in miracles are inseparable. And this:—

(1) Because the miracles are so mixed up with the history, that whatever theory is adopted to account for the record of the former, must apply equally to the latter; which would destroy the whole volume's claim to historical accuracy.

(2) Because the most esssential facts in the religious history of the Bible are themselves miracles.

This inseparability is allowed and made use of by sceptical objectors.

The question to be discussed is thus vital to the very existence of the religion.

Miracles, however, are not the only evidence on behalf of the religion and history of the Bible. There are, besides, evidences *external—literary—*

and *theological*. All which must be put aside if miracles be rejected.

Thus there are difficulties on both sides, which must be weighed against each other, before deciding the question of belief:—a fact full of the most important bearings upon many detailed points, beside the main topic.

In the present work, however, only the difficulties on *one side* are to be discussed, viz. those against miracles. The inquiry is hence strictly preliminary.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT ARE MIRACLES? . . . . pp. 27—39

The discussion concerns Scripture miracles only;—hence the Scriptural definition of a miracle is the right one to take.

Miracles are denoted in Scripture by three terms—'marvel'—'mighty work'—'sign.' The precise meaning of each;—they are not synonymous, or exclusive, but complementary;—the full view of a miracle combines all three.

Objectors mostly confine themselves to one aspect of miracles only;—may often be refuted by a mere reference to the other omitted aspects. Hence, an apparently formidable objection, under one head, may turn out to be altogether irrelevant when miracles are viewed as a whole. Illustration, in exemplification of this, drawn from the 'Mont Cenis' tunnel.

Proof that the three terms do not in Scripture denote different kinds of miracles, but different aspects.

Final definition of a miracle.

CHAPTER II.

MIRACLES REGARDED AS MARVELS . . pp. 40—76

Miracles are 'marvels' because they are extraordinary phenomena contrary to prior human experience. Is then every such phenomenon unworthy of credence?

The fact of miracles having been thought credible for so long and by so many, is a strong argument to the contrary; not, however, pressed here.

How do we get experience?—It comes gradually by observation; every addition to it being something *different* from what prior experience has told us of. To reject all phenomena different from prior experience would thus be to destroy experience altogether. The case remains essentially the same whatever the amount either of the experience diverged from, or of the divergence itself.

But miracles are said not merely to be different from past experience, but *contrary* to it. What does 'contrary' here mean? Not experience, in regard to the alleged marvels, which contradicts their marvellous character, but experience concerning other related phenomena which warrants an expectation contrary to the occurrence of a miracle. Illustrations of this from Scripture.

Does such contrariety then involve incredibility? Instances of non-miraculous marvels in proof of the contrary;—eclipses—arctic climate—ice—and other natural phenomena;—diving apparatus—cure of cataract—spheroidal state—diamagnetism—and other phenomena of art and science. Examination of these instances to show their sufficient parallelism to miracles for the purpose of the argument, so long as both are regarded exclusively as *phenomena*. Conclusion to be drawn as to the worth of the objection.

Application of this argument to Hume's dilemma concerning miracles and testimony. The dilemma shown to lead to absurd conclusions in parallel cases;—hence either intrinsically unsound, or irrelevant. Its intrinsic faults are not sufficient to account for the conclusions it leads to. Examination of the way in which men really judge of the credibility of of things contrary to their experience:—a reference to causation or circumstance leads them to see or suspect that their experience is not really relevant; when Hume's dilemma drops out of sight altogether. Illustrations of this. Application of the solution thus given to the case of miracles. Miracles claim to be connected with agency and circumstances, whose influence man's prior experience is quite unable to determine. Until, therefore, this claim is decided, (and that in the negative,) Hume's dilemma does not apply.

General result of the chapter:—the credibility of miracles as 'marvels,' depends upon their credibility as 'mighty works,' and as 'signs.'

CHAPTER III.

MIRACLES REGARDED AS MIGHTY WORKS pp. 77—165

The causation of miracles a point of great intrinsic importance, apart from the result of the last chapter.

The Bible view of their causation:—not more properly God's works than every other event in Nature and providence; spoken of habitually in similar terms. Their speciality lies not in their relation to God, but to Nature, and to man;—are events out of Nature's ordinary course, and such as manifest God's working more strikingly.

Two classes of objections to be met:—

(1) Deistical. Miracles cannot have come from the same Author as Nature.

(2) Atheistical. Miracles require the assumption of an Intelligent First Cause, which Nature does not.

General statement of the *first* of these objections in its primary and simplest form. "Nature is uniform, and rigidly subject to law;—miracles are violations of that uniformity and law;—therefore miracles are incredible."

What precisely is meant by this uniformity?—not one merely of recurring phenomena,—nor even of the sequence of phenomena upon one another, though this is included,—but a uniformity of *causation*, the elements which go to make up phenomena having always one and the same properties, and obeying one and the same laws.

This doctrine of science here frankly accepted as true. Certain preliminary cautions, however, are necessary:—(i) we very likely do not know all the matter and force which constitute the world of Nature;—(ii) nor, certainly, all the properties and laws of this matter and force;—(iii) nor, consequently, any thing like all the phenomena which may occur in Nature. Effect of these cautions upon the course of scientific inquiry;—our ignorance of Nature must always be borne in mind when deciding on the credibility of new phenomena. What kind of phenomena then really are, in a scientific view, incredible?—those only, where some known law or property, which ought to have had an influence in a phenomenon, can be shown to have had either no, or some other, influence. Mere inadequacy of known laws to explain phenomena, or apparent but explicable contrariety, never allowed by scientific men

as an objection. Illustrations of this:—ozone—red phosphorus—the abnormal expansion of water —&c.

Application of this scientific method to miracles. Some are too like well-known Natural phenomena to need discussing. Detailed examination of others: —those which seem to violate gravitation (the passage of the Jordan, &c.);—those which seem to violate astronomical laws, (the sun and moon standing, the return of the sun's shadow);—those which seem to violate laws of heat (the three youths, Gideon's fleece, &c.);—those which seem to involve creation or transformation of matter, (feeding the five thousand, &c.);—those wrought on man, (healing, resurrection, &c.). General result of this examination:—miracles are events, for the most part, wholly inexplicable by Natural laws; but it cannot be affirmed of any of them with certainty that they involve a violation of those laws. They require a similar assumption to explain them with the instances of scientific phenomena mentioned above; and stand therefore (so far) upon the same footing of credibility.

The above argument assumes (i) that the outward acts accompanying miracles were not their sole cause; and (ii) that the unknown elements in their causation were (proximately) Natural forces. Reasons for these assumptions. Objections urged against the second:—(a) Natural causes are insufficient; (b) by this means the distinction between miracles and non-miracles is destroyed. The answers to these may be best obtained by proceeding to—

The second phase of the Deistical objection:—"The reign of law in Nature includes not only the constitution

of phenomena internally, but their determination externally. Even if miracles violate no law in their immediate causation, they are such events as law by itself would never have brought about. In this sense therefore miracles do violate law."

The fact that Nature alone is inadequate to produce miracles is freely conceded. (Bearing of this upon objection of lack of distinction between miracles and non-miracles). How does this affect their credibility? Illustration of a locomotive drawing a train,—an event in Nature, and ruled rigidly by law, yet which Nature alone would not have brought about. Precise relations of Natural causes and of mind in the production of the locomotive—what mind did not do, and what it did—essential limitations of mind's action—yet how much mind does. Allow *mind*, therefore, and there may well be events in Nature, such as Nature by itself would never have produced.

Objections to this argument:—verbal—materialistic—necessitarian.

The assumption of a (superhuman) directive mind to account for the occurrence of miracles is not made merely for the sake of the argument, but is an essential part of the Scriptural claim. All therefore turns upon whether the account of the causation of miracles in Scripture is admitted. How far this account has been tested so far. (Bearing of the results upon the alleged insufficiency of Natural causes). What yet remains to be discussed:—two fundamental positions, (i) that there is a God, (ii) that He chose to use His power to work miracles. The second of these belongs to Chap. iv.; the first leads us to—

The Atheistic type of objection. Exact form in which

this presents itself now-a-days,—not "there is no God," but "we do not know that there is, and have no right to assume one. Nature does not require such an assumption; but miracles do; therefore miracles and Nature are inconsistent."

Insufficiency of this position to prove the incredibility of miracles. Illustration of supposed Roman encampment. Nothing but the assertion that Nature is inconsistent with the existence of God can prove miracles to be really at variance with Nature.

But the objection, though thus, for its proper end, invalid, is intrinsically most important; since, if admitted, it throws the whole burden of proof for God's existence upon miracles; whereas Scripture assumes this as granted before miracles are appealed to at all.

In what sense Natural phenomena may be said to be sufficiently accounted for by matter force and law,—only as isolated phenomena, not as a whole. Viewing Nature as a whole, matter force and law fail to account (i) for their own existence, (ii) for their being in action, instead of at rest, (iii) for their results tending to promote the welfare of man, &c.

(i) There is no Natural creative power discoverable in Nature; creation, therefore, must have come from some other quarter. Reasons why this argument cannot be pressed.

(ii) All material action implies a cause, so that the mind is not satisfied until some reason for its occurrence is found. On this instinctive conviction, that there must be a cause for every action, all science depends. Yet all that science can do is to refer us back to other actions, which, in like man-

ner, require causes to account for them, and which cannot, therefore, explain the whole series. Laws do not touch the matter; for these are simply our expressions of the uniform manner in which action takes place, not in any sense causes of action.

With this is associated a physical difficulty—the degradation of force. Natural phenomena require not only certain quantities of force, but that force at certain intensities. In nearly every phenomenon some part of the force used is lowered in intensity, so that the total force after the phenomenon is no longer able to accomplish all that it could before. Hence it follows—(a) that Nature is not a self-sustaining system which can go on reproducing itself for ever;—(b) that the tendency of Nature as a whole is steadily to passivity and equilibrium;—(c) that there must have been originally in Nature vast stores of force, such as Nature cannot produce, or there could have been no such action going on as we now see.

These considerations leave but two alternatives open—either the initial cause was mental, or Natural law has not always reigned. The latter may be rejected as destructive to all science. The former then alone remains. Further examination of its necessity. Connexion of this line of thought with the universal notions of God diffused throughout all nations. Transition from God as the Prime-mover to God as the Creator.

(iii) The argument from design too well known to need more than just mentioning. What, precisely, it adds to the previous positions,—some knowledge of God's character.

Result of these three points:—Nature cannot be

accounted for without God; miracles, therefore, have not to prove His existence. Further, to account for the course of Nature we need to assume that God acted in just such a way (as the Prime-mover of phenomena) as we need to assume He acted if we would account for miracles. Initial phenomena of Nature are in their causation indistinguishable from miracles. Nature and miracles, then, are in the strictest harmony, both being explicable only on one assumption, and that one the very same in both cases.

General summary of this chapter; in itself, and in its bearing on the one before:—miracles are credible as 'marvels' and as 'mighty works,' if it is credible that God chose to work them.

CHAPTER IV.

MIRACLES REGARDED AS SIGNS . . pp. 166—227

This title the most prominent in Scripture, because it implies the ends for which miracles were wrought. This also the most important view of miracles controversially, since the credibility of miracles being wrought by God must depend upon the ends to be attained by them.

'Sign' implies a purpose outside the thing itself. This very necessary to bear in mind, lest the intrinsic value of miracles should overcloud their higher and more proper end—their significance. Reasons why their significance must always be of superior import to all other ends they served.

What is it that miracles signify?—Invariably some truth about God and His relation to man. Hence their credibility as signs depends on—

(i) the credibility of God purposing to make known such truths.

(ii) the credibility of His using miracles for this end.

The first of these questions is one of great difficulty from the lack of any sufficient independent knowledge of God's character and purposes. What course must be pursued under these circumstances.

Inferences may be drawn (a) from evidence of design in Nature; (b) from man's moral convictions, instincts, and longings; (c) from man being able, to some extent, to discern and know his Maker. None of these afford sufficient ground for saying that God would probably vouchsafe a revelation; but they all combine to show that His doing so would be rather more credible than not.

The second question admits of an easier answer. All revelation is in its very essence miraculous; hence, without miracles, no revelation could be given. The credibility of the one involves the credibility of the other.

Objection:—"It is inconsistent with God's character, as manifested in Nature, that He should work miracles, or in any way interfere with the course He had once foreseeen and planned out as the best."

Answer:—The fact that infractions of Nature's uniformity do not occur whenever we think we want them, only shows that we have no right to expect them in other cases, not that they can never occur. Though the undeviating course of Nature strikingly exhibits God's foreknowledge and immutability, it by no means follows that infractions of that course are therefore inconsistent with those attributes. Such infractions may have been as much foreseen and planned as the other events. Events belonging to Nature's ordinary course might have fulfilled all the intrinsic ends of miracles; but they

could never have had their significance. Scripture claims for miracles, in many ways, that they were part of a long foreseen, deliberate plan.

Though miracles may not exhibit some attributes of God so clearly as Nature does, they exhibit others more clearly, and especially His condescension to man's weakness in giving them at all.

This general vindication of miracles' credibility as signs is not enough. Beside this, the special credibility of Scripture miracles must be considered.

Miracles of revelation (i. e. mental miracles) are indispensable to revelation; but many of those in Scripture are not such, or such only in part. Of these we cannot plead necessity; it must suffice to show that they were advantageous and congruous.

Physical miracles promoted revelation—(i) as heralds and credentials of God's messengers; (ii) as embodiments and illustrations of His message.

Application of these two principles to the solution of difficulties urged concerning certain Scripture miracles. Some are said to be trivial—those connected with Elisha, Christ's turning water into wine, &c. Some are said to be grotesque—Balaam's ass, Jonah and the fish. Some are said to be vindictive —Elijah's calling down fire, Christ's cursing the fig-tree, &c. General conclusion to be drawn from this examination. Some minor considerations in favour of the credibility of miracles as signs.

Is all the ground of sceptical subjection done away?—on the contrary, we have only now arrived at the real root of the matter. The argument has shown that the credibility of miracles as 'marvels' and 'mighty works' rests on their credibility as 'signs', and this on their congruity to the Scripture scheme of revelation. The credibility of the latter is the fundamental point still left open to attack.

Why this point is not discussed here:—the position of the argument now is exactly the converse of what it was at starting; then miracles were alleged as difficulties in the way of believing the religion, now they are shown only to become difficulties when the religion is first disbelieved. All that was proposed to be done has thus been accomplished—miracles are shown not to be difficulties in the way of faith.

Further results from this:—(i) all attacks on the Bible and its religion through miracles are nothing more than reasoning in a circle;—(ii) the real source of sceptical feeling about miracles lies in prior doubts about God's agency and the religion generally.

Objection:—"If the religion must first be admitted as credible, before miracles can be believed, what use are they? And is not urging them as evidences of the religion a case also of reasoning in a circle?"

Answer:—(i) Miracles are not to be believed because they are credible, but because they actually occurred. All that the proof of their credibility does is to clear the way of objections, so that the proper evidence may have its due weight. The relation of miracles to the religion is only a negative criterion of their truth; the positive criteria are altogether independent. Hence there is no reasoning in a circle here.

(ii) It is not required that the religion be credited, but only regarded as credible, i. e. such an one as *may* possibly be true, and which appropriate evidence *may* therefore establish. Again, a negative criterion only. It is the work of miracles to lead men up from this admission of possible truth, to actual belief.

Ultimate view of the function of miracles:—as

'marvels,' they arouse attention by their extraordinary character; as 'mighty works' they awaken a presumption of supernatural agency; as 'signs' they point to God as their author, and His revelation of Himself as their ends. Who will receive their message?—those only who see no fatal objection to the revelation being true, and who are desirous of the instruction and benefits it brings. All others will reject them, or remain indifferent.

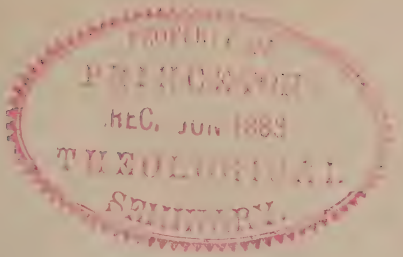
Indirect way in which miracles may lead those who discredit the revelation to ultimate faith;—denying miracles as 'signs' they must further either deny them to be 'mighty works,' or deny them to be 'marvels.' The second is the alternative always taken now-a-days. This brings the sceptic face to face with the difficulties which attend such a denial (those, namely, referred to in the Introduction); which may lead him to give up his own difficulties as of lesser weight.

Miracles bring the question of belief or disbelief to a sharp and definite issue, being the focus of all evidence and of all revelation. Hence called by Moses the 'temptations' or testings of God. A similar function belongs to them still.

Objection to this:—"This is not the sort of evidence God ought to have given." Vindication of its propriety and justice; how small the minimum of faith is which is required, and each item of it derivable from evidence common to all men.

Final answer to the question "Can we believe in miracles?"

The question "Ought we to believe?" remains open, to be settled on other grounds.



INTRODUCTION.

The religion of the Bible, whether in its earlier phase of Judaism, or in its later phase of Christianity, is essentially a religion based on historical facts. Each step in its progress is not only inseparably connected with such facts, but actually consists in them. The call of Abraham, the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan, the establishment of the Monarchy, were not mere historical reminiscences of the Jews, as the Norman Conquest or the Reformation are among ourselves, but they were the very foundation-stones of their faith. If it could be shown that the accounts handed down to us of the Norman Conquest, or the Reformation, were utterly untrustworthy,—so much so as to make it a matter of serious doubt whether any events of the kind really happened at all,—then we should indeed

have lost the clue by which to account for much that we are familiar with and enjoy at the present day; but of practical consequences arising from such an alteration in our view of the past, there would be few indeed. Not so, however, with the Jew and his history. The Jew believed himself to be one of God's specially chosen people, to be living under a Divinely-given law, to be dwelling in a Divinely-appointed land, to be destined to yet greater glories and privileges under a Divine King, of David's seed, yet to come. And each one of these distinctive points of faith rested directly upon facts in bygone history, and derived from these their whole validity and strength. If it could be shown that the histories of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and David were untrustworthy, and the facts hitherto believed concerning them uncertain or untrue, then the faith of the Jew was without rational foundation. He must either give up all that was distinctive in his religion; or if he retained it, it must be merely as a pleasant fancy of his own imagination.

Still more so is this the case with Christianity. The birth of Jesus, His ministry, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His gift of the Spirit, are the very sum and substance of the Christian religion. Every thing that is distino-

tive in Christianity is embodied in these historical facts, and stands or falls with them. If it can be shown that the accounts we have of these alleged events are legendary or mythical, and the events themselves consequently doubtful or fictitious, then Christianity as a distinct religion is destitute of any rational basis. How completely Christianity is thus bound up in the history of the Gospels and Acts may be seen by a glance at the oldest and most wide-spread of all Christian formularies, the Apostles' Creed. Strike out from that Creed every clause that clearly depends for its validity upon the histories of the New Testament, and what is there left? Nothing but the opening words about God as Father and Creator, and at most a fragment or two of the closing section, of which all the distinctive foundation has been swept away by the omission of the rest. In a word, it would not be a Christian creed at all, but one of bare Theism, to call which Christianity is simply an abuse of terms. Some there are, no doubt, who talk of such meagre beliefs, combined with high morality, as the essence of Christianity. But with what right? Theism and morality, however essential to Christianity, are common in greater or less degree to many other systems also; while all that is distinctive in

Christian Theism and morality comes from the relation in which these elements stand to the historical facts of its Founder's life and work. To call these common elements, then, the essence of Christianity,—ignoring all that, whether by ennobling them, or still more by its own proper significance and worth, distinguishes Christianity from other religions,—is not only to sin against the unanimous witness of the Christian Church throughout all ages (which must surely be admitted as decisive), but is intrinsically unfair.

Taking, then, this as the basis of our position, that the religion of the Bible, from first to last, is a religion directly resting upon and bound up in historical facts, so that without a belief in those facts it is impossible really to believe in or hold the religion,—the next step in the argument is clear. The history of the Bible is essentially a miraculous history. A belief in miracles is, therefore, inseparable from either Jewish or Christian faith. This inseparability appears in two ways. *First:* the miracles recorded in Scripture are too intimately mixed up with its history generally to allow of their being rejected without most seriously damaging the worth and credibility of the records as a whole. *Second:* many of the most funda-

mental facts of Bible faith not only involve, but are themselves miracles, so that to reject miracles is to reject the very basis and essence of Scriptural religion. A few words will suffice to illustrate and enforce these two positions.

1st. If the miraculous events recorded in the Pentateuch, say, or the Gospels, are to be regarded as untrue, then how did they come to form part of these narratives? Three suppositions are possible. It may be (i) that they are *legends*, the exaggerated and distorted traditions of bygone events, which acquired a miraculous colouring by long transmission from mouth to mouth. Or (ii) they may be *myths*, the more or less deliberate inventions of imaginative men desirous of clothing their ideas with the semblance of reality. Or (iii) they may be the deliberate *falsehoods* of men intending to deceive. This last alternative is one seldom taken by the objector to miracles now-a-days; but the other two, variously combined and modified to suit each particular critic's taste, are largely prevalent. What, then, do these involve? The legendary theory assumes as its very essence that the narrator is far removed from the events he describes, and obtains his information through a circuitous chain of unveracious witnesses, whose amplifi-

cations and distortions he has no independent means of correcting. The testimony of such a one to any fact so obtained is clearly all but worthless. A residuum of truth there doubtless is in nearly every legend; but how is it to be discriminated and verified? Nor is the case better on the mythical theory. For here, not only must the narrator be distant from the events described, but he must be one who cares little or nothing for the real truth in regard to those events, since he does not hesitate to use fictions concerning them as vehicles for his ideas. The truth of the history is in his eyes a thing of so little practical moment, that he regards it as of no consequence how he misrepresents it.

These two elements,—distance in the narrator, accompanied with untrustworthy information, which he cannot sift; and a disregard or even contempt for the actual facts (if known) as of no practical importance,—constitute, either separately or together, the essence of every theory which has been started to account for the miraculous history of the Bible without admitting real miracles. Either element is utterly fatal to veracious history. The retailer of legends and the creator of myths are each alike incompatible with the true historian. We

do, indeed, find legends and real history conjoined in many, especially of the ancient historians. But conjoined in what way? Invariably the legends in the earlier part of the narrative, where the writer had only meagre and traditional information to go upon; and the history in the later part, where the writer was either contemporary, or had access to contemporary records; the legendary element steadily decreasing as the narrative approaches the writer's own days. If, then, it could be shown that the miracles of the Bible were found only in the accounts of early times, and disappeared from the story more and more as we came to contemporary witnesses, there would be some colour for the opinion that miracles are the offspring of tradition. But this is not the case. In the Old Testament, miracles are distributed over nearly every part of the history, and are as plentiful in the days of the kings, when the most destructive of critics admit the existence of contemporaneous writers, as in those of Moses or the judges, and *more* plentiful than in the still earlier days of the patriarchs. In the Gospels there are simply *no* miracles recorded as wrought by Christ during the first thirty years of His life, the most tempting field by far for legend, and

especially myth, as is strikingly shown in the later apocryphal gospels[1]; but all are concentrated into the three or four years of His public ministry, when contemporaneous testimony, adverse as well as favourable, was necessarily abundant. So once more in the other writings of the New Testament; while, with the exception of the great fundamental miracles of the Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension, and Giving of the Spirit, there are exceedingly few references to the miraculous works of Christ; there are frequent and pointed references to miracles connected with the Apostles, or occurring in the Church in their days; and this as much in those writings which are admitted by all to be contemporaneous (as the epistles of Paul to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians, whose genuineness no critic has yet dared to contravene[2]), as in those which rationalists are accustomed to assign to a later

[1] In the apocryphal gospels there are over fifty miracles ascribed to Christ which are not mentioned in the four canonical ones. Of these one only belongs to His public ministry, and about fifty to His early childhood. In the canonical Gospels there are none in His childhood, but some thirty or forty in His public ministry, excluding the numerous *general* statements about healing.

[2] Rom. xv. 18, 19; 1 Cor. xii. 4—11, 28—30, xv. 8; 2 Cor. xii. 1—5, 12; Gal. i. 11, 12, 15, 16, iii. 5.

period. These facts make the legendary or mythical origin of the Scripture miracles very difficult to believe in. To dwell on this is not, however, our object here. The point insisted on is (1), that if miracles are to be rejected, some such hypothesis to account for their existence in the Scripture records is inevitable; and (2), that miracles are so distributed throughout Scripture, that whatever hypothesis is adopted in regard to them must be extended to the entire history. No historical book in the New Testament, and but few in the Old, are without their miracles; nor has the keenest critical dissection of these books into fragments-by-divers-authors been able to discern in them a primitive non-miraculous story of any extent or importance. The miraculous element runs through them all, and is so inextricably interwoven with the more ordinary events which they narrate, that its rejection leads inevitably to the rejection of these also, so far as they depend for their acceptance upon the testimony of the books. Those events in Jewish or Christian history which are witnessed to by profane authorities will, of course, remain in any case, but all else becomes utterly uncertain, if not positively untrue; a heap of admitted fable, legend, or imposture, intermixed

with matter most reasonably suspected to be of the same character; in which whatever grains of truth there are must be discriminated by intrinsic probability merely, and the exercise of critical acumen. That such histories, so composed, afford no basis whatever for a historical religion is self-evident. Even if the events on which the religion is founded are not themselves miraculous, yet they stand on no better or more trustworthy basis than do the miracles commingled with them, which are henceforth to be regarded as legends, myths, or downright falsehoods;—that is, they have no rational basis whatever.

But, 2nd, the case is, in truth, worse still; for the fundamental facts both of Judaism and Christianity are not merely associated with miracles, but themselves *are* miracles. That Abraham left his native country, and sojourned in Canaan; that after long oppression in Egypt the Israelites came out under Moses, journeyed through the wilderness, and conquered their land;—these were facts of no value to the Jews religiously, except as essentially involving miracles. It was the fact that Abraham went out at God's command, received God's promises, entered into covenant with Him; that the Exodus was brought about by special

Divine interference, the land obtained by special Divine assistance;—this it was that made these facts the corner-stones of Jewish faith. Each fact was, more or less, a miracle; and by virtue of its being so, and not otherwise, was it of worth religiously. So in a still higher degree is it with Christianity. That in the days of Tiberius Cæsar a teacher appeared in Judæa, called Jesus of Nazareth, who went about preaching to the people, and helping the sick and suffering so far as His powers allowed, and who at last was executed as a felon in Jerusalem;—of what value were such facts as these, as the foundation of a religion? It was because this Jesus of Nazareth was not an ordinary man, but by His miraculous birth was at once both Son of Man and Son of God; because He proved Himself by superhuman works to be the promised Messiah; because He not only died, but rose again the third day; and having risen was taken up into glory in heaven, whence He poured out upon His waiting Church the gift of the Spirit;—it was because of these miraculous facts concerning Jesus Christ that His name became the distinguishing mark, His life and person the one foundation[3], of the noblest and most in-

[3] 1 Cor. iii. 9—11; 1 Pet. ii. 4—7.

fluential religion (even its enemies being judges) that the world has ever seen. Take away miracles from Christianity, and you take away its very essence; for it is miracles, and nothing but miracles, which makes Christianity a distinct and powerful religion. "If Christ be not risen," wrote Paul to the Corinthians, "then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins." And if this is true with regard to *one* fundamental miracle only, how much more when to this we *add* all the other miracles besides, and consider what would be the result if they also were rejected?

This inseparable connexion of miracles with the history and faith of the Bible, is one fully recognized and made use of by its antagonists. Does a rationalist critic wish to invalidate the genuineness or authenticity of any book or narrative of Scripture? It suffices to point out that it contains some account or mention of miracles; clearly, then, it cannot be contemporary or trustworthy, for miracles cannot, under any circumstances, be believed to have occurred. Is it desired to attack the strongholds of Christian dogma? It is enough to remark that they involve miracles; and miracles are incredible; plainly, then, the dogmas

must be rejected by all rational men. This is, in brief, the main gist of the sceptical objections against both Book and Faith. Whatever other arguments there are, are mostly subordinate and auxiliary, and unable in themselves to bear the weight of the conclusions sought to be established. And this main line of sceptical argument is, we have seen, just and logical. The rejection of miracles as intrinsically incredible *does* involve all that the extremest opponents of the Bible allege. The entire authority of the Book, its history and its faith, rests upon and is bound up with the occurrence of miracles. Reject these, and the whole superstructure falls to the ground.

This, then, is the issue depending on the question, "Can we believe in Miracles?" It is no mere question of accepting or rejecting certain stories of bygone days of no practical moment to ourselves; it is no question even of a particular part of Bible religion, or of a particular branch of its evidences; but it is a question vital to the very existence of the religion. And this being so, the believer clearly has a right to demand that the disproof of miracles which objectors bring forward should be cogent, unanswerable and complete.

But further, that history, and that faith, which

must be surrendered if miracles be disproved, are very far from resting upon miracles only for their proof. There is abundant evidence for the veracity and authenticity of the sacred books, arising from other and most varied sources, and steadily increasing in strength and consistency as the means of testing their accuracy is extended, now in one direction and now in another. It matters not whether it be the discovery of ancient historical monuments in Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, &c., or whether it be the more minute and critical investigation of such monuments and records as have been long known; whether it be the exploration of countries which the Bible speaks of, a better acquaintance with their Natural history, or enlarged information regarding the manners and customs of their inhabitants past and present; in every case the result is the same,—extension of the power to test the accuracy of Scripture issues in an extension of its evidences. Difficulties disappear, or are not unfrequently resolved into powerful proofs of authenticity. Daniel's alleged blunder about Belshazzar, and Luke's about Cyrenius' first taxing, turn out when we really know the facts of the case to be no blunders at all, but simply evidences that Daniel and Luke were much better acquainted

with the history of the times they wrote of than those profane authorities with whom they had been disparagingly compared. Different parts of this confirmatory evidence of course affect different portions of the Biblical history. Acquaintance with the minute geography, natural history, &c., of Palestine, for instance, is of little or no worth as a sign of veracity in Old Testament books, because whenever these may have been written their writers would equally be familiar with such things, being natives of the country. In the New Testament, on the contrary, such acquaintance is worth a good deal, since only in the *earliest* ages of the Church's history was it at all probable that the writers of her historical books would be men thus familiar with Palestine. Minute acquaintance with the country in this case affords a strong presumption in favour of early date. On the other hand, precise accuracy in historical matters is of more importance as evidence in the earlier writings than in the later, because in these latter there were greater facilities for a distant author obtaining correct information than in the former. And so with other cases.

But external evidence of this kind is very far from being all the proof for the Bible's

authenticity. There is, besides, the internal evidence afforded by literary criticism, undesigned coincidences, and the nature of the subject-matter generally. Some of these lines of argument, and especially literary criticism, and that comparison of one part of Scripture with another which discloses undesigned coincidences, have been, no doubt, largely used by the opponents of Scripture as weapons of attack. But whatever success such may have had for a time has depended mainly upon the effective support afforded them by the denial of miracles. With the position laid down as a foundation, that a narrative *must* be either legendary or mythical in some of its main features, every literary characteristic assumes a new appearance, being viewed through a distorting medium, and with an inexorable bias in favour of one kind of inferences only. It is easy, too, on such a theory to represent accounts as diverse traditions of the same event, involving contradictions, which in reality refer to wholly different events; and so to multiply discrepances, which are afterwards alleged as proofs of late date and unauthentic narration. Wherever hostile critics have tried to assail Scripture by these paths *without* denying miracles, they have failed most completely; the utter assump-

tion of their dogmatic criteria of dates and accuracy being in itself a sufficient refutation of their arguments. On the other hand, wherever the methods of internal evidence have been fully carried out by able and unprejudiced critics, the result has invariably been the elucidation of a most valuable mass of corroborative proof. And here again the tendency of further research is to increase the amount and worth of the evidence thus obtainable.

Further still, there is the evidence, which comes directly home to the *religion* of the Bible, and does not merely touch the authenticity and genuineness of its several books. There is the long chain of prophecy, linking on the successive stages of the religion to one another, and binding all indissolubly to the person and work of Christ. There is the scarcely less wonderful history of the growth and triumph of the Christian Church in the face of the mightiest and most varied opposition. There is the profound theology, gradually developing from epoch to epoch, yet harmonious and consistent throughout. There is the sublime and unequalled picture of the character of Jesus, acknowledged even by unbelievers to be unrivalled as a portrait of the ideal perfect man. There is the influential power of the religion on the

personal life and nature of its recipients, both past and present. All these are facts which must be accounted for. The Bible accounts for them simply and easily by the one principle of miracle. Supernatural forces, superhuman agencies have been at work in this religion from the beginning until now, and therefore facts are as they are. The explanation is admittedly sufficient. But the denier of miracle has no such single and natural explanation at hand. Now he resorts to one principle, now to another, now to several working together; but in vain, the facts are too high, too unhuman, for any selection or combination of common principles possibly to account for them. Till at last, despairing of any other escape from the difficulty, the sceptic resorts once more to his old plea—at all events, by denying the Bible explanation of these facts you keep clear of miracles, and these involve even greater difficulties than those thus incurred.

Whether this be so, or not, is beside our present purpose to inquire. It would indeed be premature to do so before the question of the difficulties of miracles had been fully discussed. But the point to be observed is, that the existence of these different branches of evidence occasions an important set of difficul-

ties on the other side also. Assuming for a moment that the difficulties in the way of a belief in miracles are as great as many allege, yet if they do not amount to miracles being impossible, it by no means follows that we must therefore reject them. It would be necessary to weigh against the difficulties of miracles, the accumulated difficulties that beset their rejection; those namely, which are involved in regarding nearly the entire Bible as unhistorical, and the whole of its religion as false. And only if the former difficulties were found to be greater and more weighty than the latter, would the rejection of miracles be a legitimate logical conclusion. Should the preponderance of difficulty appear to be the other way, then however hard it might be to believe in miracles, we should be constrained to do so, because to disbelieve them would involve a harder alternative yet.

It is scarcely possible to lay too much stress upon this fact of there being difficulties on both sides. We are told that the progress of intelligence, and especially of science, renders a faith in miracles more and more difficult as time advances. Possibly so. It is, however, at least equally certain that this same progress, in other directions, by multiplying evidences of

the veracity of Scripture, is as steadily increasing the difficulties of rejecting them. We are told, by another class of objectors, that although those living near the time might believe in miracles, on account of the strength of the personal testimony in their favour, yet that time and distance have so weakened the force of this evidence that to us they cannot but appear dubious. Let it be so. This same *time* has, however, also developed a new kind of evidence—the witness of history, the testimony of the results of miracles, in the growth and triumphs of the Christian Church. Granted, then, that we have less evidence for the fact of miracles having happened than had the believers of the first century, we have much more evidence for the *effects* that sprang from them, and the effects imply the cause. So, once more, with the theories to which sceptics are obliged to have recourse in order to account for the existence of miraculous stories in the Bible. The easier the hypothesis is made for the purpose in view, the harder it is to reconcile it with the stubborn facts on the other side. In explaining, for instance, the origin of the four Gospels, so full of miracles from beginning to end, the rationalist is obliged to assume (1) that they were not written by those whose

names they bear, but by other unknown authors; (2) that these authors were not contemporaries, but men who obtained their information through a circuitous course; and, (3) that during this transmission the original facts (whatever they were) were exaggerated, distorted, idealized, or otherwise changed and added to, according to the particular type of legendary or mythical theory adopted. The farther removed the assumed writers were from the events described, the longer the chain of tradition through which their information came, the *easier* it is to account for the growth of legend or myth. But each of these assumptions is fraught with difficulties which also increase in weight precisely as this interval between the events and their narration is extended. The greater the interval, the harder it is to understand how such forgeries and fables could have been successfully imposed upon the ever-extending Church, so as to obtain that wide-spread and universal reception which no one can deny that the Gospels had long before the close of the 2nd century; the harder it is to account for the innumerable marks of genuineness and authenticity which characterize them, and which are still further enhanced by their many links of mutual relation-

ship in the midst of the most unmistakable signs of independence; the harder it is to assign any adequate cause for that earliest part of the Church's history, which according to these theories preceded the belief in Christian miracles, or while that belief was being developed from the meagre substratum of fact which rationalism regards as underlying the Gospel narrative; precisely *the* part of Church history which it is hardest to explain on purely naturalistic principles. Thus, whichever way we turn, the importance of remembering that there are two sides to this question of difficulties, which must be considered and weighed one against the other before any decision can be arrived at, is very apparent.

It might seem from this, that the discussion of the question, "Can we believe in Miracles?" would involve an examination of the whole range of Bible evidences. But this is not the case. Our question is not "must we believe," but "can we believe?" In other words, it is only the difficulties on *one* side that are about to be discussed. For which very reason it seemed to be of especial importance that the existence and importance of the difficulties on the *other* side should be clearly set forth before commencing the investigation; since other-

wise it might be thought that on the answer to this question depended the whole claim of Christianity to our belief, and so a false colouring be given to our inquiry. If, indeed, there should appear to be reason to answer the question in the negative; if it should be proved that miracles are impossible, and therefore that we *cannot* under any circumstances believe in them, then truly the whole claim of Christianity would be thereby set aside. But no other answer save this would settle the matter. If it should appear that miracles are just credible, under certain very peculiar circumstances; or if it should appear that they are something more than credible, perhaps probable, in certain cases; the claim of Christianity could in neither instance be decided by the answer to this question alone. We should still need to ascertain (1) whether these circumstances were in fact present; and (2) what other evidence there is for or against that religion; before we could decide whether it ought to be accepted or not. The present inquiry, then, is strictly preliminary. It proposes simply to ascertain what value there is in the current objections to miracles, and what position miracles consequently occupy in regard to the claims of the Bible generally. Are they obstacles to faith

as commonly alleged, or are they not? And if obstacles, then of what kind; insuperable, or partial; destructive of all other evidence, or capable of being overcome by stronger evidence on the other side? This, and nothing more, is the question here proposed to be discussed.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT ARE MIRACLES?

It is not proposed to discuss miracles in general or in the abstract, but exclusively Scripture miracles. And this for two reasons: 1st. In regard to these only is there any issue of sufficient practical and universal importance to make it worth while to investigate minutely their credibility. If there were no miracles in the Bible the question "can we believe in them?" would be one merely of curious philosophic or archæological research, not, as it is, one of general and profound interest. 2nd. By thus defining the range of the discussion it gains very much in clearness and reality. We are not concerned with scientific abstractions, or unknown and perhaps supposititious cases, but with things exceedingly familiar to us from childhood; by our acquaintance with which we can at any point of the discussion pass easily to concrete examples and illustrations, and thus both test and realize the value of any

argument, objection, or explanation that may come before us.

And because we have thus to do only with Scripture miracles, it is manifestly but fair that we take our *definition* of miracles also from Scripture, instead of from any opinion or fancy of our own. The object of the discussion is to test the truth of the statements which the Bible makes in regard to miracles. Let us, then, first of all ascertain what the Bible *does* state, what it calls a miracle, and wherein it teaches that the worth and importance of a miracle consists.

There are three terms used consistently throughout Scripture to denote miracles; terms not synonymous but complementary, each one regarding miracles from a different stand-point, and with regard to a different element in their constitution, so that the full idea of a miracle is only obtained by combining the three terms together. These three terms are "marvel" (מוֹפֵת, פֶּלֶא, *τέρας*) "mighty work" (*δύναμις*[1]), and "sign," (אוֹת, *σημεῖον*).[2]

[1] This idea is expressed in Hebrew by the periphrases "mighty hand," "outstretched arm," or some expression of that kind.

[2] In the Old Testament there is also a fourth term, מַסָּה, "temptation," the force of which as applied to miracles will come under notice at the close of Chap. IV.

By "marvel" miracles are described as unusual, extraordinary, wonderful occurrences; the outward aspect which they would present to the observer even at a cursory glance; in which marvellous character, accordingly, lay their power to attract attention and arouse inquiry.

By "mighty work," on the other hand, miracles are described in their inner aspect, with respect to the agency by which they are brought about. The extraordinary occurrences are asserted to have a special cause, which cause is characteristically "power;" that is, in Biblical language, *Divine action*.

By "sign," lastly, miracles are described with regard to their purpose; the end in view, for the sake of which they are wrought; which end is something beyond and higher than themselves; that is, something *moral*.

In a word, "marvel" denotes a miracle viewed as a *phenomenon* in human experience; "mighty work" as an *effect* of special Divine action; "sign" as an *instrument* for the attainment of moral ends.

It is of the utmost importance for the just consideration and fair discussion of this question of miracles that these three aspects under which they may be viewed,—these three elements of their constitution,—should not be dissevered.

The instant we leave one or other out of account, and regard miracles exclusively from this narrowed stand-point, we are no longer discussing Scripture miracles at all, but mutilated fragments of these, such as the Bible does *not* ask us to believe in. When, for example, an objector chooses to speak of miracles merely as "marvels," that is, as external phenomena, tacitly ignoring the agency by which the Bible represents them as having been wrought, and the ends which they were designed to accomplish; and when, thus regarding them, he urges their extreme improbability, and appeals to our common sense whether if we heard of such things happening now-a-days we should not unhesitatingly disbelieve them, even if supported by strong testimony; we may safely, if we please, admit the force of his reasoning, without in the slightest degree invalidating our faith in miracles. For, we might retort, the Bible does not ask us to believe in mere marvels, but in marvels wrought by an adequate cause and for a sufficient end, and it is these added elements that make the marvels credible. Add these to the supposed case happening now-a-days, and we shall be as ready to believe it as we were before to disbelieve it. So, again, with those

objectors who concentrate their attention upon the second term in the Scriptural definition, and regard miracles merely as "mighty works," ignoring the element of "sign." These often argue that the uniformity of Nature excludes the very possibility of a miracle, for even granting that God is able (*i. e.* has the power if He so willed) to bring about such occurrences, yet He certainly *would* not, for He is unchangeable and consistent, and the uniformity of Nature exactly represents this characteristic of His being; any deviation from which uniformity would imply, therefore, a deviation from His own nature, which is impossible. Suppose it is so, the believer in miracles might reply; still you have left out of account the fact that miracles are "signs" also, that they belong to the *moral* order of the universe as well as to the physical, and that it is in their relation to this moral order (higher by far than the physical) that the reason and purpose of their occurrence lies; with which moral order it is, therefore, that they must be compared, if we would rightly judge of their consistency with God's character.

The objections and replies here sketched out will come under consideration in detail farther on, when also the intrinsic validity of the

sceptical arguments, as well as their relevancy to the end proposed to be attained by them, will be discussed. They are alluded to here merely as illustrations of the importance of adhering firmly to the full Scriptural definition of miracles, instead of accepting as sufficient the one-sided notions commonly put forth and argued on by objectors. It is enough, we have seen, merely to supply the missing element in such partial statements, and some of the most formidable objections sink at once, without further trouble, into nothingness. They may be valid objections to the belief in things more or less resembling, in one or other aspect, the miracles of the Bible; but inasmuch as these latter claim to be *more* than the objections take account of, they are of no validity against these, since the addition of the lacking points shows the objections to be, in regard to these, altogether irrelevant.

When, therefore, we consider (as we are about to do) the various objections which have been raised against miracles, under these three heads of "marvels," "mighty works," and "signs," it is clear that no objection under one only can be admitted as final until its relation to the other two has been carefully weighed; except, indeed, it be of such a character as to prove

miracles to be impossible. If it can be shown that "marvels," such as Scripture tells of, are phenomena altogether incredible under any circumstances; or if it can be shown that "mighty works," such as it relates, are effects which simply *cannot* in any case have been produced; then, indeed, it avails nothing to proceed to the further head of "signs." But if the objection falls ever so little short of this, —if it establishes ever so high *improbability* merely,—then it is quite possible that the transition to the following heads may remove this improbability altogether, or even turn the balance the other way. Take a case from non-miraculous history by way of illustration. Suppose any one to hear for the first time of the opening of the tunnel under Mont Cenis, and to hear of it only as a phenomenon, the agency and purpose of its construction being left out of account,—what would he say to it? That a hollow cavity of small but uniform dimensions, and over seven miles in length, should have been formed at the base of a lofty range of mountains, proceeding in a straight line right through it from side to side,—this surely is most improbable. And if, further, he should be informed that the cavity began to be formed at both ends at once; that there had

been, in fact, two of these cavities, quite independent of each other, starting from opposite sides, which at the end of fifteen years of growth had exactly met, and opened into one another in the middle; he would instantly pronounce the whole story a hoax. The hollowing of narrow cavities in mountains is certainly a well-known Natural phenomenon; but such a cavity as *this* is so utterly antagonistic to all that is known of Nature, that one really cannot believe in it. But now let our supposed sceptic have his attention turned to the new point of *agency*. This cavity through the Alps is something more than a Natural phenomenon, it is the work of man. Now how stands the case? All the difficulties hitherto perceived are at an end. The work is an arduous one truly, yet one well within the powers of the agent. But new difficulties speedily arise;—why should men have taken the trouble to excavate this subterranean passage? It must have cost an enormous sum of money, immense labour, great skill; and that not of one man merely, but of many combined together, of two nations even. From what observation teaches us about human nature, it is certain that men will not thus combine and labour except for ends very dear or profitable to them-

selves. Agriculture, manufacture, commerce —these are the occupations which men exert themselves in, and spend their money and skill upon, not boring holes through mountains. It is inconsistent with human nature to suppose such a thing to have been done; and therefore, *possible* as it is (with the agency alleged) for a work like this to have been accomplished, it must notwithstanding be pronounced incredible, since we cannot believe the agent to have ever occupied himself in any thing of the kind. The improbability in this case is, perhaps, somewhat less than in the former one, when the tunnel was regarded merely as a phenomenon; still it is very considerable, and quite sufficient to render any but the most direct and trustworthy evidence extremely doubtful. But now, lastly, if the sceptic be still further informed as to the *object* for which this passage was cut,—that it is a railway-tunnel; and if the necessity and the advantages of such a tunnel just in this place be fully pointed out, so that he regards its opening no longer merely in itself, or even as a work of man, but in all its circumstances and relations, as a work designed and exactly adapted to accomplish a particular end, which end is one quite consistent with what he knows the agent would be

likely to seek after and work for;—how stands the case then? Now *all* difficulties of credence are gone. It is no harder to believe that there is such a tunnel opened under Mont Cenis, than it is to believe the ordinary events of every-day life. Just such a series of successive steps must we pass through in dealing with miracles. We cannot rest with regarding them merely as phenomena, nor even as effects of Divine action; they must be viewed also in relation to the ends said to be designed and accomplished through their instrumentality, before any valid answer can be given to the inquiry, "Can we believe in them?" There may, as in the illustration just discussed, be great and well-nigh insuperable difficulties in the way of belief at each of the preliminary stages, and yet when the matter is viewed as a whole they may turn out to be really more probable than not.

One thing only now remains to be done before proceeding to the details of our inquiry; and that is to show that the three terms "marvel," "mighty work," and "sign," do in Scripture represent different aspects or elements of a miracle, as is asserted, and not different kinds or orders of miracles. In the first place it is to be noted that never in the New Testament, and but very rarely in the Old, do we meet with

"marvel" *alone*, as the designation of a miracle. It is always associated with one of the others, most commonly with "sign." Thus in Exod. vii. 3, Deut. vi. 22, xxix. 3, Psalm lxxviii. 43, cv. 27, the miracles of the Exodus are described as "signs" and "marvels," the two terms being in the last two passages disposed as equivalents in the parallel members of the Hebrew verse, and clearly, therefore, relate to the same events. But, further, these same miracles are in Exod. x. 1, 2, Josh. xxiv. 17, called "signs" only, and in Psalm lxxviii. 11, 12, "marvels" only; an additional proof of the common reference of the two terms. "Signs" and "mighty works" (or rather one of the Hebrew equivalents to this latter term) are coupled together in Deut. xi. 2, 3; while all three terms are found, still in allusion to these same miracles, in Deut. iv. 34, vii. 19, xxvi. 8. These instances from the accounts of the Exodus sufficiently illustrate the identity of reference of the terms in the usage of the Old Testament. Passing now to the New, it is to be observed that the only term ever used for an individual miracle is "sign" (John ii. 11, iv. 54, Acts iv. 16). Of general terms denoting the whole series of Gospel miracles, we find in the first three Evangelists habitually "mighty works" (Matt.

xi. 21, 23, xiii. 58, xiv. 2, Mark vi. 5, 14, ix. 39, Luke x. 13); in the fourth as habitually "signs" (John ii. 23, iii. 2, vi. 2, 26, ix. 16, x. 41; xi. 47, xii. 37), or in one instance "signs and marvels" (John iv. 48); which, as there is no difference in the *kind* of miracles the several Evangelists record, may be taken as a conclusive proof of the identity of "signs" with "mighty works." In Acts ii. 22, the miracles of Christ are denoted by all three terms taken together. So, again, with the miracles of the Apostolic Church. In Acts xix. 11, 1 Cor. xii. 10, 28, Gal. iii. 5, they are called "mighty works;" in Mark xvi. 17, 20, Acts viii. 6, "signs;" in Acts viii. 13, "signs and mighty works;" in Acts ii. 43, v. 12, vi. 8, xiv. 3, xv. 12, Rom. xv. 19, "signs and marvels;" while in 2 Cor. xii. 12, Heb. ii. 4, again all three terms are used. Nothing can be clearer than that all this diversity arises simply from the different aspects under which the same events might be viewed, or in some cases perhaps merely from the natural interchange of words every where recognized as equivalent. Of any distinction in reference, so that one term would denote one set of events, and another term a different set, there is not the slightest trace.

We adhere, then, to the definition set forth

at starting, that a miracle is a marvellous phenomenon, brought about by special Divine agency, for the attainment of moral ends; which three aspects or elements are denoted by the three Scripture terms, "marvel," "mighty work," and "sign;" and all of which aspects and elements of miracles must be borne in mind and fully considered before the question of their credibility can be finally decided on.

CHAPTER II.

MIRACLES REGARDED AS MARVELS.

The marvellous character of miracles depends upon their being phenomena of an unusual and extraordinary kind, different from and contrary to what experience would have led one to expect. The question now before us is, How far, and in what way, this character of miracles affects their credibility?

Is there any law of the human mind which forbids belief in the marvellous? Must every fact worthy of credence be one in accordance with, or at all events not in discordance with past experience? Would it be a sound canon, either of practical or scientific faith, to say that nothing should be believed which was inconsistent with what we already knew, either directly from personal observation, or indirectly from the observations of others with which we were acquainted? This is the issue upon which the answer to our question about the credibility of miracles as "marvels" depends.

There is no doubt whatever that miracles are phenomena contrary to experience. It is part of their essence that they are so. For not only is this implied in the term "marvel," but Scripture over and over again explicitly asserts for its miracles that they differed from all previously known phenomena, and claims regard for them on this very account. "Such as neither thy fathers nor thy fathers' fathers have known,"—this is the description given by Moses of the miracles attending the Exodus. (Exod. ix. 18, 24, x. 6, 14, xi. 6; Deut. iv. 32, 34, viii. 3.) "Works that none other man did,"—this is Christ's description of His own miracles (John xv. 24). When, therefore, the opponents of miracles make it a reason for rejecting them, that miracles are contrary to experience, they are merely repeating what Scripture has already said concerning them. How then can this be a valid reason for their rejection? It can be so only if it be laid down as a general principle, that *nothing* which is contrary to a man's prior experience ought to be believed by him. Then, of course, it logically follows that miracles, being avowedly contrary to experience, are incredible. But nothing short of such a general principle is sufficient to establish this conclusion.

Under "man's prior experience" we include, it will be observed, his acquaintance with the experience of others (so far as he has reason to think this worthy of credit), as well as his own personal observation. The principle to be tested cannot be said, therefore, to be unfairly limited or narrowed, since we include under "experience," all that any man can possibly have at his disposal, wherewith to judge the credibility of any new phenomena which demand his belief.

It might seem enough to settle this question to point to the fact that, in all ages and throughout all countries, men have been found ready to believe in miracles, though fully admitting them to be phenomena contrary to experience. It might even be asserted with great probability, that those who have thus believed, or at all events professed to believe, in miracles, have formed an absolute majority of the human race. While no one could deny that among these believers there were at least as many names of the greatest eminence in every department of human excellence,—art, literature, statesmanship, philosophy, science,—as could possibly be mentioned on the other side. How, we might ask, could this have been so, if there were a law of the human mind inexorably for-

bidding belief in any thing contrary to experience? Such an argument, however, valid as it is, might seem too much like endeavouring to swamp objections by an appeal to authority; which is very far from our purpose. It has, moreover, the disadvantage of meeting an objection which regards miracles under one aspect only, by an answer which has to do with them as a whole. We waive it, therefore, and proceed to examine the principle at issue in an entirely different manner.

Whence comes this experience which is to be the standard of our faith? It is not the creation of an instant, but the slowly developed product of the whole life. Nor is this development the mere unfolding of knowledge from within, potentially present all along. So far as the knowledge of phenomena is concerned, all are agreed that this comes to us from without, by observation, and cannot proceed from within. The very term "experience," indeed, has come to mean in technical metaphysical language, that knowledge of phenomena which we obtain by observation. Experience, then, is a thing constantly being added to, for it is by additions that it grows. And each increase of experience is plainly the addition of some new item of knowledge *different* from that

which was known before; for if it be not different, then there is no real increase of experience. Repetition of the same observation can only strengthen and confirm our knowledge of that particular phenomenon, not increase our knowledge of phenomena generally. Experience thus depends for its very existence upon the observation of phenomena *different* from any previously observed, and upon the credence which the mind gives to these. If, then, it were laid down as a principle that no phenomenon ought to be believed in, which *differed* from those we had already experience of, the result would be the annihilation of the very standard appealed to. We should have no experience left wherewith to try the new fact. Such a conclusion is too manifestly absurd and self-contradictory to be admitted by any one for an instant. We may, therefore, regard it as conceded, that the mere difference of a phenomenon from those known to prior experience is no ground whatever for rejecting it as incredible.

Nor is the case altered whatever be the amount of experience from which the new phenomenon diverges; or whatever be the amount of its divergence, and consequent strangeness. Many of the discoveries of science

are phenomena which it may be safely affirmed had never up to the time of their discovery been observed or known by a single human being. The experience from which they differed was a strictly universal one. Yet would any one venture to urge this absolute novelty and uniqueness of the phenomenon as a reason why it should not be believed? A rule of this kind would plainly be fatal to the whole of science. Not even, then, universal experience ignorant of a phenomenon, is to be admitted as a valid ground for discrediting a single experience in its favour. Nor can the *amount* of the divergence do this. A large number of the experiences of every one are, when they first come, as utterly different from any thing before known, as any miracle; and are the natural occasion of a corresponding wonderment. The experiences of children present abundant examples of these absolutely strange and astonishing phenomena; while in later life nearly every explorer and investigator, whether of countries or of science, meets with such more or less frequently in his researches. Whoever, in fact, enters any field of knowledge previously (by him) untrod, will, almost as a matter of course, came across phenomena so entirely different from any thing he has known

before, that the thought, how curious! how strange! how surprising! how wonderful! will be often in his mind, if not upon his lips. But what then? Should he on account of this strangeness, this divergence of his present experience from his previous ones, reject the new phenomenon as incredible? Or should those who by indirect means share his experience reject it, because *they* have never seen or heard of such things before? Again, it is clear that upon such a principle there would be an end to all discovery, all progress and diffusion of knowledge whatever. The observer of a very strange or very new phenomenon ought, indeed, naturally to be more careful in verifying the reality of the phenomenon, than if it were one long and well known. The indirect sharers in his experience would be only right in requiring somewhat stronger evidence of his probity and ability, to protect themselves from the risk of imposture or mistake. But to refuse credence on the mere ground of the phenomenon being so very different from any thing hitherto known, would be simply absurd. The concession of this point also may be safely assumed.

One case only remains to be discussed, which however contains the kernel of the whole

matter. Miracles, it is contended, and with justice, are not phenomena merely different from experience, but *contrary* to it; and hence their incredibility.

The first thing to determine, then, is what precisely we mean by "contrary to experience." It clearly cannot mean that we have experience of each particular phenomenon asserted to be miraculous, which experience entitles us to pronounce it *not* miraculous. No one, for example, asserts that we have direct evidence in regard to each individual miracle recorded in the Book of Exodus, which warrants us in affirming that the events there described as strange and marvellous were *not* strange and marvellous, but only ordinary. No witness is alleged who saw the so-called miracles of Christ, and testifies of them that they were *not* the marvels which the New Testament describes them to have been, but only common-place events. The most that has ever been done in this direction is to bring forward certain writers who speak of the times, or more rarely the persons, in question, and who omit all mention of the miracles. But this is not contrary experience, but only absence of evidence,—an element in the question of a wholly different character, whose discussion here would be

altogether out of place. It is to be observed, further, that even if there were such contradictory experience (for this, if existent, would be its proper title), it would not effect the purpose in view. For particular experience against individual miracles could manifestly affect those only which it immediately concerned, and would leave the credibility of other miracles, and of miracles in general, quite untouched. Moreover, there would not be in this case a universal experience against miracles, as is alleged to be the case in the argument under consideration; but only the particular experience of these individual adverse witnesses, whose testimony would have to be balanced against the equally particular testimony of the witnesses on the other side. Since then the argument against miracles, as being contrary to experience, is brought forward as one conclusive against *all* miracles indifferently, and as claiming on its behalf the universal experience of mankind; it is plain that, on its own showing, it cannot be *this* sort of contrariety which it has in view, but some other; for this sort fails completely to answer to the characteristics claimed for it. Experience contrary to miracles does not mean, then, experience in regard to the particular events alleged to be

miraculous, but experience in regard to *some other events*.

But how, it must be asked, can such experience about *other* things, *other* phenomena, be properly denoted "contrary experience?" It is so called because it is experience which causes the miracle to appear less probable than its contrary. For example, it is related in Scripture that on more than one occasion the water of the river Jordan was stayed in part of its course, so that a dry passage was made right across its bed. Now rivers are things with which mankind have had much to do, and of which they have hence much experience. And this experience, so far as we know it, all goes in favour of rivers flowing steadily on, and not (with the exception of the cases mentioned in Scripture) in favour of their at times standing still and leaving a dry passage across. Judged, therefore, by the probabilities of experience, the contrary of the Scripture event is more likely to have occurred than the event itself. Or, again, the Bible narrates several instances of blind men having their sight restored by a mere touch, accompanied sometimes by anointing with clay, or washing. But blindness is a thing of which, again, mankind has had large experience; and this ex-

perience, so far as we know it, all goes (saving these Biblical exceptions) against blindness being thus removed. Judged, therefore, by experience the alleged miracles are decidedly less probable than their contraries. This, precisely, is what is meant by "contrary experience." It is experience in regard to *similar* phenomena to that under dispute; and experience of such a kind as to render the occurrence of that phenomenon less probable than the occurrence of its contrary. That miracles are in this sense "contrary to experience," and are, therefore, as phenomena, decidedly improbable, is, we have seen, part of the claim of Scripture on their behalf. The point to be discussed here is, what measure and kind of improbability it is which this contrariety to experience brings with it. Above all, is it such as to make a phenomenon thus contrary incredible?

To settle this question we must inquire, as before, how the rule of rejecting all such phenomena would hold in other cases; in cases, that is, in which a phenomenon is *contrary* to prior experience, yet without involving any thing miraculous. We commence with some illustrations in respect to phenomena of Nature.

It is quite possible that there may be persons now living on the earth who have never seen or heard of an eclipse. Let such, then, hear for the first time of the occurrence of one. They are told that certain persons, it may be in a far-off country, have seen the moon, when shining at its full, gradually become obscured in the clearest sky, without cloud or other apparent cause; that they have seen it reduced from a full round orb to the thinnest crescent, and then this at last disappear too, leaving nothing where the moon had been, but a circle of dull murky red; that they have seen the crescent reappear and grow before their eyes till it returned once more to the full bright moon again; and all this in the space of a few hours, on a single night. Or, again, they are told that at midday in the broadest sunshine, and a cloudless heaven, darkness has been seen to creep on, at first stealthily and then with rapid strides, yet without fog or mist or cloud, till the sun itself has been turned into blackness, and there has been night in the midst of day. What would those who knew nothing of eclipses say to such stories? It is not a case where they have no experience to appeal to. They have experience, and that ample, in regard both to sun and

moon. They have watched them and been familiar with them from childhood; others around them have done the same; the combined experience of all is at their disposal. And the result of this experience is directly opposed to the phenomena now alleged. They know that the moon does *not* become obscured in the way asserted; that when it turns into a crescent, disappears, and reappears, growing again to its original size, this is *not* the work of a few hours, but of a whole month; and that in these changes it does *not* turn red. They know that day and night succeed each other in regular order, and that night does *not* occur in the middle of the day, nor any approach to it except through clouds, or fogs, or something of that sort. In a word, these phenomena are utterly "contrary" to their experience.

Again: there are, beyond doubt, a large number of persons inhabiting the world who have no knowledge whatever of the peculiarities of climate in the Arctic regions. Suppose then such to be informed by travellers, or books, that there was in those parts a day sometimes that lasted a month or more, during which it was never dark; and, again, a night as long, during which the sun was never seen; while in one place there was, in fact, but one day and one

night, of six months each, which together made up the whole year;—what would they reply? Days and nights, their limits and their variations, are phenomena familiar to all, and of which they have accordingly large experience. And what says this experience? It is distinctly and, so far as they know it, universally, against the phenomena alleged, and in favour of its contrary.

The story of the Eastern prince who had never seen or heard of frozen water, till one day a traveller told him that in his country men were accustomed to walk about and even ride on the water, which was hard and bore their weight like the solid earth—is well known and very apposite. Here, again, there was a large experience to appeal to. Water and its properties were quite familiar to the prince and his people, and they knew well that men could not walk or ride on water without immediately sinking into it; that water never did become solid or hard; that in fact their whole experience was directly "contrary" to the phenomena alleged.

Illustrations of this kind might easily be multiplied. Such phenomena as comets, the Aurora Borealis, mock suns, the monsoon winds, waterspouts, earthquakes, volcanoes, flying-fish,

&c., &c., might be dwelt upon in the same way as those just noticed. And in each case it would be easy to show that there were many people who had no experience of these things, but who had experience of other things similar to these, or otherwise intimately related; which experience was directly "contrary" to the phenomena in question; and this in precisely the same sense as it is said (and with truth) that experience is contrary to miracles.

Infrequent or local Natural phenomena are by no means, however, the only things which come under this head of phenomena contrary to experience. Examples may be drawn as easily from the appliances of art and the discoveries of science.

No men have more experience of the length of time during which a human being can remain under water without suffocation than the pearl-fishers of the east. It is certain that at the time when the diving-bell and its various contrivances first came into use, it must have been unknown to these eastern fishermen. If, then, some one had come and told them that in another country a man had been known to dive under the water, remain there for hours moving about at the bottom, and at the end come up to the top unhurt, and not even exhausted,

what would be their answer? Surely they would appeal at once to their experience as being wholly inconsistent with such a phenomenon. They, and their companions, and their ancestors, in fact every one whose testimony they had ever in any way come across, all agreed that such a thing was utterly "contrary" to their experience; in fact, they would say, impossible.

The steam-engine, railways, telegraphs, balloons, gunpowder, and many more similar inventions, might all be treated in the same way; for all present us with phenomena strikingly contrary to the whole previous experience of mankind.

It would be easy, again, to instance examples from the progress of medical and especially surgical art. We might take such a case as the successful cure of cataract on the eye. The disease was one well known, but which had hitherto resisted all attempts at cure. The entire experience of the medical profession, and we may safely add, if need be, of the whole human race, was that cataract was incurable. But at last it was asserted that cataract *had* in a particular case been cured; a phenomenon, however, "contrary" to all experience. Ought it to have been believed?

But, lastly, let us come to physical science, and see how this rule about phenomena contrary to experience applies there. We select a couple of illustrations from among many which suggest themselves. Every one knows that the effect of intense heat upon substances is generally to make them melt, or boil, or burn, certainly not to make them freeze. It is utterly contrary to all experience that a liquid should, upon being poured into a vessel very much hotter than itself, be forthwith found to have become frozen. Yet the following is a phenomenon described in modern scientific books:—A metal crucible is taken and raised to a bright red heat, into this is put a particular mixture which speedily causes brilliant flames to appear at the top of the crucible; liquid quicksilver is then poured in, and in a few seconds it is removed from the centre of the crucible (which all the while has been maintained at its intense heat by a spirit-lamp), through the flame, a solid *frozen* mass! Now quicksilver freezes at a temperature very much lower than water,—as much lower (nearly) as the temperature of ice is lower than scalding water. Yet it is asserted,—and the present writer can bear witness to having seen the phenomenon with his own eyes,—that quick-

silver can actually be brought from the ordinary temperature down to its freezing point in a red hot crucible surmounted by flames, and that, too, within a fraction of an inch of positive contact with its sides. Surely a phenomenon more absolutely "contrary" to experience, it is hard to conceive.

The appeal here is to ordinary every-day experience. Let us choose for our closing example one where it is strictly scientific experience which is sinned against. It was stated in scientific books up to 1845, and generally believed throughout the scientific world, that the action of magnets was confined to a very few substances, and was always an action of the same kind with that exerted on iron. These statements and belief were based on a long and wide scientific experience of magnets and their properties, the result of careful experiment. But at this date Faraday asserted that he had observed new and opposite phenomena,—phenomena which went to show that magnets affected *all* substances without exception, and the majority in a totally different fashion from iron. Such phenomena, then, were directly "contrary" to prior scientific experience. Ought they to have been believed?

It will be observed that in all these instances (which might easily be multiplied twenty-fold) any reference to the causes of the phenomena spoken of has been carefully avoided. They have been regarded exclusively in their outward aspect as strange and wonderful phenomena. And this for two reasons:—1st, because the whole question of causation as affecting credibility is to come before us in the next chapter, and would therefore be out of place here; 2nd, and chiefly, because it is as phenomena only, excluding all reference to causation, that *miracles* are regarded by the objection under discussion; and, therefore, fairness demands that any other phenomena placed in comparison with them should be regarded in the same exclusive light. To compare the credibility of miracles, omitting all consideration of their cause, with the credibility of other occurrences viewed in connexion with their causes, would be manifestly unjust. And that this is the way in which the objection regards miracles is clear, for it appeals to "universal experience" as being contrary to miracles. But of the causes of phenomena, whether natural or artificial, the vast body of mankind are certainly, and have always been, profoundly ignorant. They do not know *how* or *why*

things are as they are, but only *that* they are so. In other words they know them only as phenomena. If then it is a "universal experience" which is appealed to as contrary to miracles, plainly "miracles" here are regarded only as phenomena. Now we desire to test the worth of this appeal by extending it to other cases. In simple fairness to the objection, therefore, we are bound in considering these to deal in like manner with phenomena only, leaving the bearing of causation upon the argument to be discussed at a later stage.

Taking these parallel occurrences, then, merely as phenomena, we ask, Does their contrariety to experience render them incredible? Ought those persons whose experience they contravened, on that account to have rejected them as unworthy of credence? We take first of all the case of those who observed these phenomena personally. Ought the man who first saw an eclipse, or who first visited the Arctic regions, or who for the first time in his life saw frozen water,—ought these to have refused to believe the testimony of their senses, because the phenomena before them were opposed to everything they had seen or known before? If so, then a very large proportion both of science and of knowledge

generally must be at once set aside as based on mere illusions: phenomena which men say indeed they saw, but which they ought certainly, even if they did see, to have unhesitatingly rejected as incredible. It needs no argument to refute such a conclusion; its absurdity is patent on the face of it. And with the conclusion the principle on which it rests must of course be abandoned likewise. It is clear that contrariety to prior experience, however large and intelligent that experience may be, is *not* a sufficient ground for an observer to refuse credence to a new phenomenon.

We pass, then, to the other and commoner case of those who depend for their knowledge upon the observation of others, and in general upon that observation as recorded in books. The number of those who, in any of the instances cited above, could have a first-hand acquaintance with that particular marvel, must always have been very small compared with those who knew of it only by hearsay. How ought these latter to have received the testimony borne to its occurrence? Ought they to have rejected it as incredible? If so, then it follows that no one ought to believe such phenomena, except they behold them with their own eyes. Is this a principle which any one would

dare to endorse in regard to science, say, or the knowledge of foreign lands? Again, the conclusion arrived at is too patently absurd to be worth discussing. And again the underlying principle goes with it. It is admitted that in these cases contrary experience, even when universal, is *not* a sufficient ground for rejecting testimony to new phenomena as incredible.

But some will say, the experience in these alleged parallel instances is not universal. The phenomena in question have been observed repeatedly, have been checked and verified, and so have become actually *part* of our experience, instead of being contrary to it. True; but then the question is not, are they credible to us now? but, were they credible to those who first came in contact with them? To them they must necessarily have appeared contrary to universal experience; for what is universal experience to any one, but the whole experience with which each is, directly or indirectly, acquainted? To gather together into one the entire experience of the whole human race on any point, be it miracles or any thing else, has never been, and can never be done. The utmost that any one can actually appeal to is the experience possessed by

himself; which, if it be large and consistent, he assumes to be that of the whole world also, and hence calls "universal." This is what the sceptic appeals to as opposed to miracles, and this precisely it is which we have seen to be equally opposed to a large number of phenomena in Nature and art, in the case of those freshly coming in contact with them. In many of the instances named, the experience opposed to the phenomena was to the full as large and consistent, and therefore as much entitled to be styled "universal," as that which is opposed to miracles. In none of them was there any thing in past experience which could suggest a thought of its insufficiency. The attempted distinction between such phenomena and miracles in regard to the universality of the experience opposed to them, breaks down utterly.

Nor can any distinction be drawn in regard to the measure of contrariety involved in the two cases. The instances cited are phenomena to the full *as* contrary to experience as miracles are. It would be easy to parallel most of them with phenomena alleged to be miraculous. We might compare eclipses with the sun and moon standing still; the Arctic nights with the plague of darkness in Egypt; the solidity of water with Christ's walking on the sea of

Galilee; the diver's long continuance beneath the surface with the preservation of Jonah in the fish; the cure of cataract with the cure of blindness; the freezing of quicksilver in a red-hot crucible with the safety of the three youths in the burning fiery furnace. The parallelism (each case being regarded exclusively as a *phenomenon*[1]) is in many cases remarkably close. The miracles named are fair specimens of those which Scripture relates, and comprise some of the most stupendous and improbable. Suppose, then, that these miracles were severally related along with the parallel non-miraculous phenomena to persons previously unacquainted with either, but who had experience relevant to each, what would be the reception they respectively obtained? Can any one say that the miracle would seem one whit more "contrary to experience" than the non-miracle? Would not both stand to the hearers on precisely the same footing, equally opposed to all prior

[1] This is carefully to be borne in mind throughout the argument. No parallelism or similarity whatever is pleaded for here, but that which belongs to the things in question *solely as phenomena*. Nor is it asserted, or wished to be implied, that the credibility of miracles as a whole is the same as, or rests on the same footing as, the credibility of these non-miracles, but only their credibility under the one aspect of "marvels."

knowledge, equally improbable, equally (if you please) incredible?

The case being thus, that there is no distinction which can be maintained between miracles and many other marvellous phenomena (so long as both are regarded merely as phenomena), either in respect to the universality or the contrariety of the prior experience to which they are, on first hearing, opposed; it is clear that whatever rule there is which is to determine the credibility of such phenomena, must apply in the same manner and with equal force to both alike. But we have seen that in regard to non-miraculous marvels the principle of rejecting what is contrary to experience is utterly untenable, and leads to absurd conclusions. Equally untenable, then, and equally absurd is it on this ground to pronounce miracles incredible. They are in this respect no whit more unworthy of credence than hosts of phenomena which the most utter disbeliever in miracles believes in firmly. If miracles are to be proved incredible, it must be on other grounds than this.

This, however, is very far from all which our argument contains or implies. It is especially valuable as settling once for all the validity of Hume's celebrated dilemma touching miracles

and testimony. All credence, argues Hume, rests, or ought to rest, on the balance of probability being in favour of the thing believed in. Miracles have in their favour a certain amount of testimony, on which their claim to be believed rests. But they have against them the contrary experience of mankind. Their credibility, then, rests upon the balance of these two probabilities—the probability of the testimony *for* them, the probability of past experience *against* them. Whichever probability is the stronger decides the case. Now, says Hume, from the very nature of the case, the probability must always be stronger in the case of the latter than the former. For on what does the probability of testimony being true depend? It depends upon experience. We have generally found testimony to be true, and therefore are ready to regard it as true in fresh cases. But in this experience we have also known many cases in which testimony was not true, which of course diminishes somewhat from the probability of its truth in the future. The experience which is opposed to miracles, on the other hand, is a uniform, unchequered experience. The probability arising from it, then, against the miracle, must always be a *stronger* probability than that on behalf of the

testimony, *for* the miracle. In other words, it is always more probable that testimony should be false, than a miracle true. Miracles, then, resting as they do upon testimony, can never be believed. The balance of probability is invariably against them.

A more telling and plausible argument has seldom been constructed. But if it is true in the case of miracles, it will of course be equally true of any other phenomena which like miracles are contrary to experience. We have seen that there are many such among the discoveries and inventions of modern science. It is clear also that the knowledge which a large number of persons have of these is based solely on testimony, and chiefly the testimony of books and newspapers. How stands the case then? In opposition to belief stands their prior experience, uniform and unbroken. In favour of belief is the testimony just mentioned. But what are the probabilities in regard to this testimony? Ordinary experience of books and newspapers is certainly not in favour of their undeviating accuracy and truth. They have been known at times to bear false witness instead of true. Clearly then the probability in favour of these scientific statements must always be *less* than the probability against

them. And faith being determined by the balance of probabilities, it follows at once (on Hume's principles) that belief in such scientific statements is out of the question. They are and, with such conflicting evidence, must always be *incredible*. Of course this conclusion is absurd. These scientific statements are believed, and ought to be believed, on the testimony in question. Hume's argument, then, must manifestly be at fault somewhere; either intrinsically, or in its relation to the conclusion based upon it. Let us examine it more closely.

One slight flaw there certainly is in it intrinsically, namely, that it omits to notice that by far the greater part of the experience which any one appeals to as opposed to an alleged marvel, is derived from the testimony of others, and hence is weakened by the chance of this testimony being false, in precisely the same manner as the evidence in favour of the marvel is. So that, in fact, instead of the balance of probabilities being decidedly against the marvel, it is very nearly even. This correction, however, can at most only change the case from one of incredulity to one of hopeless doubt; since if the probabilities for and against are thus evenly balanced, we can never be sure

which side we ought to adopt. The intrinsic defect in the reasoning is not the cause, then, of the practical difficulty before us. It must lie in the relation of the argument as a whole to the conclusion built upon it.

When any one hears of a scientific marvel, does he merely compare it with the experience he has at hand, estimate the *prima facie* probabilities in favour of each, and on their balance base his final opinion? Most surely not. This is, at best, but the first stage of the process. He inquires further concerning this strange phenomenon (for as such only we have supposed it to be at first presented to his notice), —under what circumstances is it said to have occurred?—by what agency is it said to have been brought about?—and so forth. And his object in making these inquires is to ascertain whether that experience of his, which is contrary to the phenomenon, has really any right to be heard in the matter at all. For if there be in this phenomenon any important circumstance, or any agency, of the influence of which he knows nothing, then he simply has no experience whatever on the point to which to appeal. But his "contrary experience" being thus found to be irrelevant, the whole of the previous balance of probabilities is at an end.

There is the weight of testimony in favour of the phenomenon just as before, and against it there is simply nothing, except perhaps the prejudice of ignorance. It does not follow, indeed, that he at once accepts the statement made to him as true. He may require to be satisfied that the alleged circumstances, or agency, which are said to account for the strangeness of the phenomenon, did really exist, and would have the effect asserted. And failing this, he may in the end still reject it as incredible. But the very fact of his proceeding to these points shows that he is no longer regarding the question after the superficial manner of Hume's argument, but giving up this, is prepared to decide the matter on its own merits.

Take an example or two by way of illustration. The pearl-fishers, whom we suppose to have been informed concerning a European diver, and who found his exploits so entirely contrary to their own experience,—what would they, if reasonable men, proceed to inquire? Their first question would naturally be, how was it managed? Oh, they would be told, he was provided with a long pipe reaching to the top of the water, through which air was supplied to him. Now of the possibility or adequacy of such a contrivance the pearl-fishers might very likely

doubt still; but one thing would be quite clear to them—this was a case to which their experience, however large, did not apply. The instant the pipe to the top was mentioned, whether they believed it or not, that instant the phenomenon was taken out of the range of their experience altogether. They were not asked to believe in a diver *such as one of them* doing such and such things, but in a diver doing them who was equipped in a particular way of which they knew nothing. Whatever other objection there might be to belief in the statement made to them, that of contrary experience at all events had ceased to exist, and so far as *it* was concerned there was no reason whatever why they should not believe. Or again, take the case of the eastern prince and his ignorance of frost. When told that water was sometimes hard and solid, he would naturally ask, how was it so?—and when? He would be answered, When the weather was extremely cold, so cold that people were obliged to wrap themselves up and have large fires in their houses in order to keep even moderately warm. Now of the existence of such cold he might very likely doubt; but one thing would be plain—having no acquaintance with such weather, he did not in the least know what

effect it would have upon water. In a word, he had really no experience to appeal to. He might object to the cause alleged, he might doubt its efficacy, but his objection to the phenomenon as contrary to past experience was no longer tenable.

This, then, is the solution of the paradox in which Hume's principle seemed to involve us, the paradox, namely, of a sound argument leading to absurd conclusions. The principle is true, but it is not the whole truth. So long as any alleged event is regarded only as a phenomenon, the argument applies perfectly. Any phenomenon thus opposed to uniform prior experience has, so long as it is thus regarded, the balance of probability either against it or precisely even, and must always be at best, therefore, extremely doubtful. But we have no right thus to limit, nor do we in fact thus limit, our view to the phenomenal aspect of an event. We proceed to the circumstances, the agency, the cause, of the phenomenon. And the instant we are satisfied that there is something connected with it, of whose influence we are ignorant, then we at once give up altogether Hume's principle, not because it is in itself unsound, but because it is here inapplicable. The experience to which we

appealed as contrary, turns out to be really irrelevant, for it is contrary only in appearance; contrary, that is, only so long as the event is regarded exclusively in its phenomenal aspect. Nay, more; we do not even wait to have this irrelevancy of our experience *proved*; it is enough that it be shown to be open to dispute, and the field of argument is changed at once. The question is no longer between experience and testimony (which assumes that experience has a right to be heard), but it is this,—Has our experience a right to be heard?—or is there, as is alleged, some circumstance connected with the phenomenon which renders it altogether irrelevant? To appeal to experience as decisive, while this fundamental point of its right to be even heard is undecided, is simple folly. Wherever, then, a phenomenon is alleged, contrary to experience, concerning which it is also alleged that there is connected with it some circumstance or agency which places it out of the range of that experience, there the argument from experience must be for a time suspended, until this deeper question has been first resolved. Should it appear that the allegation is unfounded, and the experience is really relevant, then Hume's argument recurs in all its force. But if it be well founded, then

that argument must not only be suspended for a time, but given up altogether. Testimony will then be allowed full sway, without objection or hindrance. To put the matter in the shortest form: the effect of this extension of view is to take the event out of the class of things "contrary to experience," to which it belongs phenomenally, and put it into the class of things merely "different from experience," to which it is found really to belong. How this latter class should be dealt with was considered above (pp. 43—46). They demand keener observation, and more exact and able testimony, than phenomena familiar to all, but there is absolutely nothing against their credibility.

Now this is precisely the case with regard to miracles. Viewing them merely in their outward aspect as "marvels," they are avowedly contrary to experience. And if, consequently, our view of them were limited to this, they must in accordance with Hume's argument be pronounced at best hopelessly doubtful. They could never command credence. But it is alleged concerning them further, that they are phenomena brought about by agency, and related to circumstances, essentially *different* from any thing which ordinary experience is cognizant of. Nor is this

alleged of them merely by advocates anxious to parry the force of an opponent's attack. It is the uniform claim on their behalf by those Scriptures which alone record them. No one in Scripture, or any where else, is asked to believe in a mere "marvel," but in a marvel wrought by God's special agency and for special moral ends. As such, then, every one is bound in fairness to regard them, at all events until these further allegations on their behalf have been shown to be unfounded in fact. Then, and not till then, has any one a right to pronounce upon the credibility of miracles, regarding them exclusively as marvels. No man can appeal to a knowledge of such occurrences as miracles (as a whole) claim to be, which might enable him to judge whether they were likely or not. He simply knows nothing about them. And ignorance on the part of the recipient is not usually regarded as a sufficient or satisfactory ground for rejecting testimony. This being so, then, the mere allegation on the part of Scripture of these distinguishing circumstances necessitates the suspension for the time of all appeal to prior experience. We are bound in the first place to examine the validity of these further claims, and only should they be proved

to be baseless may we recur to the argument from experience. Should the contrary be proved or but rendered probable, that argument drops out of account entirely, not because it is itself unsound, but because it is here irrelevant. We say this is necessary, and we are bound to do it; that is, we are bound to act thus *if* we are arguing as fair and reasonable men, not swayed by prejudice to adopt a procedure here which any where else would be condemned as stupid and ridiculous, but desirous of getting at the truth in the best and surest way that reason dictates, and to this end employing those methods, and acting upon those principles, in regard to miracles, which we should employ and act upon if investigating the truth of any thing else.

To sum up the result of the present chapter in a few words:—we have found that miracles, being (phenomenally regarded) "marvels," are as such contrary to prior experience, and hence either positively improbable, or at best extremely doubtful, whatever testimony there may be in their favour. But we have also found that precisely the same might be said with equal justice of a vast number of non-miraculous phenomena in Nature and art, which yet every intelligent person regards as

worthy of ready and implicit credence. And the explanation of this appeared to be that though as phenomena these things were contrary to experience, they were not so really, because involving some circumstance of which that experience had no cognizance. Turning then to miracles, it appeared that the same explanation is essentially involved in the claim of Scripture on their behalf; it being asserted that both in agency and in purpose they are altogether out of the range of common experience; which claim if substantiated would make an appeal to such experience quite irrelevant. Pending, therefore, the consideration of this further claim (*i. e.* the remainder of the Biblical definition of miracles), no conclusion whatever can be drawn as to their credibility.

CHAPTER III.

MIRACLES REGARDED AS MIGHTY WORKS.

It would be a great mistake to regard the question of *agency*, on which we are now about to enter, as one merely subsidiary to that considered in the last chapter, and introduced here merely to settle the issue there left unresolved,—whether miracles are credible as phenomena. On the contrary, its main importance is an altogether intrinsic one. The belief that miracles were brought about by special Divine agency is a most essential independent element in the authority that Scripture claims for them, without which their credence as phenomena would be worthless. It is, moreover, in this department of the subject that objections have been especially rife in modern times. Although, therefore, our present inquiry cannot but have a direct and important bearing upon the question considered in the preceding chapter, yet as it has also other and still more important independent bearings upon the subject as a

whole, it will be better to make an entirely fresh start and discuss the question of agency on its own merits.

What does Scripture mean when it asserts miracles to be "mighty works" of God? Certainly not that miracles are the only works of God, nor even that they are more properly His works than the ordinary phenomena of Nature. Such an idea is utterly foreign to the language and the thought of Scripture. According to the Bible every thing that happens in Nature is as truly brought about by Divine agency as any miracle. Material forces are, indeed, recognized freely and fully; but they are regarded as instruments fashioned, empowered, and directed, by the immediate action of Deity. Natural laws are alluded to frequently, and even strongly insisted on[1]; but it is as manifestations of the unchangeable will and ceaseless activity of the Lawgiver. So, again, with providence. Every event in the history of His people, and the progress of His revelation, is spoken of as wrought by God, as much when it is non-miraculous as when miraculous. Nor can it even be said that the Divine agency is more insisted on in the case of miracles than

[1] *E.g.* Ps. cxlviii. 5, 6; civ. 5—8. Jer. xxxi. 35, 36; xxxiii. 20, 21. 25, 26. Eccles. i. 4—9.

in the case of ordinary occurrences. For example:—the first existence of the sun, as a luminary, is described as resulting from a Divine fiat (Gen. i. 14—18), which involved a miracle. The sun's daily rising and shining, which involves no miracle, is no less spoken of as God's work (Matt. v. 45). Compare this with the account of the sun standing still, or the shadow going back on the dial (Josh. x. 12—14; 2 Kings xx. 11), both notable miracles, and it cannot be said that God's agency is one whit more insisted on in the latter than in the former. Or again: it is said that man's soul owed its origin to God "breathing into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. ii. 7); that is, it was the work of God's Spirit: clearly a miracle of creation. But in Ps. civ. 30, the renewal of animal life generally, including of course man with the rest, is said to be brought about by God "sending forth His Spirit:" as clearly the non-miraculous process of generation constantly going on. While in Matt. i. 18, the birth of Christ, that miracle of miracles, is ascribed to precisely the same agency, and in scarcely stronger terms. Thus, whichever we take, original creation, ordinary phenomena of daily occurrence, or rare and special miracles, in all alike the same language is employed,

the same doctrine enforced. All are God's works; nor is there the shadow of a pretence for saying that one is more truly and properly His work than the other.

This fact is of great importance to keep clearly in mind in considering the question of the agency by which miracles were wrought. It has been too much the custom to assume, as if it were a matter of course, that miracles, if real events, are such as stand in a vitally different relation to God from what other things do. Now for this assumption Scripture, our sole authority on the subject, gives no warrant whatever. It is possible that the case may be as is assumed; but if it is so, this must be established on independent grounds, by showing that only thus can a miracle be conceived possible. While, failing such independent proof, the probabilities are all the other way; since the language of Scripture, so far from supporting the assumption, rather discountenances it by placing miracles and non-miracles, as regards their relation to God, on precisely the same level. Until, therefore, some distinct and powerful reasons appear to the contrary, we shall, in accordance with Scripture, regard miracles as standing in an exactly similar relation to Divine agency

with the ordinary occurrences of Nature and providence.

But it will be said, If there be no difference in the agency by which miracles were brought about, then wherein do they differ from these ordinary occurrences? The answer is plain: they differ, not in their relation to God, but in their relation to Nature, and to man. They are not the common works of God, but His special, extraordinary works. And they are works which *to man* speak more plainly of the Worker, and manifest His agency more strikingly, than those they are accustomed to in the ordinary course of events. Here, of course, is the origin of the assumption just repudiated. Because miracles bring God's agency more powerfully home to our minds, therefore it has been hastily concluded that His agency is more concerned in them. But that this conclusion is wholly unwarranted may be easily shown. One might as well say that a spoken address is more truly the work of the speaker, and involves his agency more properly, than a book does, because in the former case we feel that agency more forcibly and plainly than in the latter. If we have been accustomed to read any one's writings habitually, especially if they are impersonal in style, and are read

merely for the sake of the information they contain, (*e. g.* the articles in a newspaper), we are apt to have but a dim impression of his personality; in fact almost to forget that there is a writer at all. But we hear the same man speak, and at once the living agency is vividly forced upon our mind; it is impossible not to think of the author as well as the words. Yet would any one venture to infer that because this latter was a different and more striking manifestation of his agency than the former, therefore it was his utterance in a higher and more proper sense? As little have we a right to infer that because miracles are different and more striking manifestations of God's working, therefore they are more properly His works than the ordinary occurrences of Nature or of providence.

Thus much for the doctrine of Scripture in regard to the cause of miracles; the bearing of which upon their credibility we have now to examine.

All the objections which come under this head take their stand upon the difference of miracles from the ordinary course of Nature. One class of objectors argue that it is inconsistent with what we know of Nature to ascribe miracles to the same agency with it; and there

being no other agency to which they can be ascribed, that they are therefore incredible. Another class argue that they are incredible, because they require us to assume the existence of an agency which Nature does not, and for the assumption of which there is no warrant. The first of these lines of argument admits, or at all events does not deny, the relation of Nature to God; but it denies that *both* miracles and Nature can come from Him. The second rejects, or to say the least of it ignores, the existence of any thing beyond Nature, and refuses credence to miracles because they assume such existence. Accordingly, we may call the one the Deistical objection, the other the Atheistical; not thereby implying that every one who uses either is necessarily a Deist or an Atheist, but merely that these are the two forms of infidelity with which the arguments most exactly harmonize. They may be most conveniently discussed in the order in which we have named them.

The course of Nature is marked essentially by uniformity, such as may be best described by saying that it is under the absolute dominion of unchanging laws; miracles are events contrary to this uniformity, inconsistent with these laws; therefore they are incredible;—this is,

in brief, the main objection which presents itself under our first head. It is an objection made most commonly in the name of physical science, since it is to science that we chiefly owe that knowledge of the universal reign of law which is appealed to. The general uniformity of Nature is indeed sufficiently patent to all, without science. But it is a uniformity marked with many exceptions, which weaken not a little its value as an argument. There are many things in Nature which seem to the uninstructed observer to be independent of its regular course, and inexplicable by any of the empirical laws with which he is acquainted. Such phenomena have been thought accordingly to approximate more or less to miracles, and their existence and recognition have doubtless had something to do with the easy credence which miracles of all kinds obtained in bygone ages. Now a large number of these apparent exceptions have been shown by science to be no exceptions at all, but to be as truly part of the uniform course of Nature as the commonest occurrences are. While in regard to those yet unexplained, there is seen to be a strong presumption in favour of their also being subject to law. In the fuller light of science, then, it is urged, miracles stand out far more strik-

ingly than of old, as the only exceptions to the universal rule which characterizes the whole known world. And this it is which makes them, to the man of science, incredible.

In considering this objection let us, in the first place, determine precisely what is meant by "uniformity of Nature," and by "Natural laws." It is clear from the very claim of science to have established this uniformity more fully than empirical observation had done, that it is not uniformity of phenomena that is intended; for this uniformity common observation is quite as competent to perceive as science. The unfailing recurrence of day and night, or of seasons, for example, which are remarkable instances of phenomenal uniformity,—these are not the sort of things that are intended. Alterations in this kind of uniformity would present no difficulty to the man of science. In fact, such alterations are believed to have taken place in the past, and are expected in the future; in each case, however, strictly in accordance with Natural laws. The uniform recurrence of the same phenomena is not, then, what is here intended. A phenomenon may occur but once in the whole history of the world, and yet be as truly part of the uniform course of Nature as if it occurred every day for thousands of years.

Is it, then, the sequence of phenomena one upon another, so that whenever one phenomenon occurs another uniformly follows it,—is this what is intended? This certainly is involved in the idea of uniformity and law, but it expresses only part of that idea, and by no means the most fundamental part. Uniform sequence of phenomena is rather a consequence of Natural law than an expression of the law itself. For if this were all, then our knowledge of the reign of law would be limited indeed; far too limited to warrant that assumption of universality which is commonly made on its behalf. Phenomena are not, for the most part, simple, but complex. And owing to this, although in a rough kind of way we speak of the same phenomena occurring many times over, yet viewed scientifically this is extremely rare. There is almost always some circumstance, some element in each phenomenon, which is different in some slight degree from what it was in every other similar phenomenon we are acquainted with. Hence, a sequence of the same consequent phenomenon upon the same antecedent is strictly speaking a thing we can but very seldom observe, certainly not nearly often enough to warrant an extensive generalization n regard to other cases. Moreover, even if

this were allowable, it would be of small avail practically. For if any new case occurred in which there was even the smallest possible divergence in circumstance from those hitherto known, it would be impossible to say whether the sequence of phenomena was in accordance with the uniformity of Nature or not; these particular phenomena having, in fact, never come under observation before. Those who believed in the uniformity of Nature would doubtless assume that the principle was true in these new cases as well as in the old ones; but it would be an assumption destitute of proof, and impossible to check until (most improbable occurrence) precisely the same pair of phenomena should happen to occur together again. Nor would there be more reason to make this assumption in one case than in another, the proportion of undoubted phenomena requiring such assumption to those in which it could be tested and proved being so overwhelming. Certainly such a principle of uniformity would oppose not the slightest obstacle to a belief in miracles; since nothing would be easier than to show that in every miracle the antecedent phenomenon was different, in some respect or other, from any phenomenon with which we were acquainted, and then who should dare to

say that the consequent did not follow it in strict accordance with Natural law? The sequence of the same phenomena, one upon another, cannot then be what is really intended by the uniformity of the course of Nature. It includes this, no doubt, but this is not its full and proper expression.

Science is not content with observing phenomena either singly or in connexion. It seeks besides to analyze them into their constituents, and discover how and why it is that they are what they are, and are related to each other as they are. To use the forcible words of Professor Tyndall,—"The scientific mind can find no repose in the mere registration of sequences in Nature. The further question intrudes itself with resistless might,—Whence comes this sequence? What is it that binds the consequent with the antecedent in Nature? The truly scientific intellect never can attain rest until it reaches the *forces* by which the observed succession is produced [1]." Here then it is, in the forces underlying and occasioning phenomena, that we are to look for the realm of Nature's uniformity and Nature's laws. Every phenomenon is the result of the action

[1] *Fortnightly Review.* Art. on Miracles and Special Providences. June, 1867. Vol. I., New Series, p. 657.

of certain forces upon certain matter, and this *action* it is which is conceived by science to be rigidly and inexorably uniform. It may be viewed, of course, in two aspects, as an action *on* the matter, or as an action *of* the force [2]. In the first case the uniformity is expressed by saying that matter has certain "properties;" in the second by saying that forces have certain "laws." The varieties of force known to us in Nature being far fewer than the varieties of matter, it follows naturally that the "laws" of the former present the uniformity in a more striking aspect than the "properties" of the latter, and hence they are commonly alone referred to as exemplifying it. But, in fact, it is equally displayed in both; and which mode of expression we use in any case is merely a matter of convenience. Were phenomena generally the result of the action of one species of force upon one species of matter, science would have easy work. But this is not the case. Both matter and force are observed in Nature acting together in an exceedingly complicated

[2] In strict scientific language both these expressions would give way to the single one of *matter acting upon matter;* forces being regarded not as separate entities, but merely as modes of material action. The terms used above seem, however, more adapted for a popular argument like that here intended.

fashion. Many kinds of matter are, as a rule, subjected at once to the action of many co-working forces; the varying proportion of the former, and the varying intensity, relative and absolute, of the latter, giving rise to endless variety in the phenomena exhibited. Inexorable uniformity of phenomena, as such, is hence the very last thing that science would expect. What it asserts is, that the way in which phenomena are brought about is uniform; that every phenomenon is the direct and necessary result of the properties of the matter, and the laws of the forces, concerned in its production. These properties and laws never alter, are never in abeyance; nor is there any thing but these properties and laws which make phenomena what they are. However much phenomena may vary, then, they are still inexorably subject to law; and in their origin, however little in their appearance, are essential and undeviating parts of the uniform course of Nature.

This is the doctrine of science in regard to the reign of law; a doctrine, it will be seen, which, while it accounts for whatever there is of apparent uniformity in Nature, either in respect to the recurrence or the sequence of phenomena, claims also to account equally for

Nature's variety; in fact, to be the principle according to which all Nature is constituted from beginning to end. To inquire into the validity of this doctrine is beside our present purpose. We accept it heartily and unhesitatingly as true. Those who doubt it must be referred to scientific works for some idea of the evidence on which it rests. What concerns us here is simply its application to the case of miracles. Before proceeding to this, however, it will be well to lay down certain preliminary cautions, lest the doctrine of science just expounded should be thought to involve more than it really does. These cautions have to do, not with the doctrine itself, but with our knowledge of its details; and they are such as the man of science would, of all men, acknowledge to be very necessary to be borne in mind.

Firstly, then, we have no warrant for supposing that we are acquainted with *all* the different kinds of matter and force actually or possibly concerned in Natural phenomena. With respect to forces, the existence of an altogether unknown one is no doubt scientifically improbable, but no one would venture to say that it is impossible. While with respect to matter, every year, one might almost say every

day, is adding fresh varieties, hitherto unknown, to the already gigantic list.

Secondly, we have, if any thing, still less reason to suppose that we are acquainted with *all* the properties and laws of the matter and forces we do know. Here again discoveries are constantly being made in respect to both, which tell us in the plainest language that we must not regard our knowledge as at all commensurate with the facts possible to be known.

Thirdly,—in part in consequence of these two limitations of our knowledge, and still more in consequence of the infinite variety of possible combinations of matter and force, with but comparatively few of which we have any acquaintance,—it would be in the highest degree unreasonable to suppose that we know any thing like *all* the phenomena which the matter and forces of Nature are capable of giving rise to.

These three cautions in regard to the extent of our knowledge show very clearly how far the admitted uniformity of Nature can be lawfully used as the criterion of the credibility of any alleged phenomenon. That the phenomenon is one altogether diverse from any which science has ever examined, is no objection; for there must be myriads of such phenomena actual and

possible within the range of Nature. That the known properties and laws of matter and force are insufficient to account for its occurrence, is no fatal objection; for there are doubtless properties and laws in existence of which we as yet know nothing. That it seems to require the supposition of some unknown matter, or even some hitherto unrecognized force, is not a decisive objection; for the existence of such is very far from impossible. In these two latter cases there would be, indeed, a certain measure of improbability about the alleged phenomenon, which testimony would have to overcome: an improbability, however, which will be shown directly to be one not at all inconsistent with scientific faith. But if this be so, what phenomena, it will be said, does the reign of law in Nature warrant us in rejecting? One kind only, it must be answered, namely, such as inexorably involve a *contradiction* of those properties and laws which *are* known, and which must, if the phenomena occurred, have had part in their causation. In other words only when it can be proved that in an alleged case the forces and matter necessarily engaged must have had an action contrary to that which their properties and laws are known to require, or (which comes to the same thing) in which they

must have had no action at all;—only in such a case can we say that Natural law is violated. It will be desirable, before proceeding any further, to illustrate the position thus laid down with a few confirmatory examples.

There were few substances whose properties were better known to chemists before the year 1840 than phosphorus and oxygen. Nothing in science was more certain than that phosphorus was an extremely inflammable substance, requiring but a comparatively low temperature to cause it to burst into flame when exposed to the air. Nothing was more certain than that oxygen had the power of combining directly at ordinary temperature with some substances, as, for example, potassium, and had not the power of so combining with others, as for example, silver. It would have been hard to have named two instances of matter better known, or properties more thoroughly established. It was part of the uniformity of Nature discovered by science, that phosphorus and oxygen had these properties. Now in 1840 it was asserted that oxygen had been observed which did combine directly with silver, and that under precisely the same conditions of temperature, &c., in which oxygen hitherto had never been known to combine

with it. And, again, in 1844 it was asserted that phosphorus had been observed which was not even easily, let alone extremely, inflammable; which, in fact, required a very considerable temperature to cause it to burst into flame. Here, then, were facts asserted altogether contrary to what had hitherto been regarded as the uniform law of Nature in respect to these two elements. How were such assertions received in the scientific world? Were they rejected as incredible, because opposed to what had hitherto been deemed the laws of Nature? Not at all. Very many of those who heard of these facts when first announced accepted them unhesitatingly on the single testimony of the original observers. Others may have doubted them at first, but gave credence upon further testimony being produced, or upon themselves becoming observers of the facts. Part of this arose, no doubt, from the fact that in each case there was, along with the description of the new phenomena, some account also of the way in which they had been brought about. And this being different from any thing hitherto tried, at once placed the phenomena out of the range of past experience, upon the principle laid down at the close of the last chapter

(pp. 71—73). But this did not in any way touch the difficulty in regard to Natural law. It was not merely that such and such experiments had formerly been tried, and such and such observations made, with respect to the behaviour of phosphorus and oxygen; but it was held that these experiments and observations warranted a certain inference in regard to the essential unvarying *properties* of those substances, which might be used unhesitatingly to check and explain any new phenomena which presented themselves. And this belief had up to that moment been amply confirmed by every experiment and observation, whether like or unlike to those originally made. The mere fact of the phenomena now asserted differing in some of their circumstantials from those hitherto experienced, did not, therefore, touch the difficulty about the apparent infraction of Natural law. Nor did the nature of the circumstantial difference do this. There was nothing in the way in which these phenomena were brought about which explained *why* phosphorus and oxygen had here opposite properties to those hitherto believed to be theirs. This difficulty remains to the present day. We know *how* these novel properties may be at any time brought under notice, but *why* they

differ from the properties which the same substances (and there is no question but that they are the very same) ordinarily exhibit,—that remains an unsolved problem. There have been many theories on the subject, but there is as yet no certain knowledge. What follows then? Is our belief in the essential unvarying character of the properties of phosphorus and oxygen to be given up? Not in the least; this remains as firm as ever. But we conclude that there is some difference in the forces acting along with these material elements in the ordinary phenomena, and in the new ones, which causes their apparent properties to vary in this way, the item contributed by the matter itself being in each case precisely and necessarily the same. We believe this to be so, though knowing nothing of the nature of the difference assumed, simply because we cannot suppose the same matter to have really different or varying properties, *i.e.* we cannot suppose the constituents of Natural phenomena to be otherwise than rigidly uniform in their action and influence one upon another. All apparent oppositions to this principle must be resolved into different *groupings* of the constituents, not into differences in the action of the constituents themselves.

In the instances just discussed, we have been dealing mainly with the properties of matter, as exemplifying Nature's uniformity. Now take an example in regard to the laws controlling Natural forces:—

Few forces are better known, and have been more largely studied than heat; and no law of heat is more thoroughly established than that of its expansive influence, *i.e.* that whenever the amount of heat acting upon the particles of any body is increased, the heat tends to push those particles farther from one another than they were before. From which the practical inference at once follows, that whenever we raise the temperature of a body it will, if all other circumstances remain the same, increase in size. Both principle and practical inference have been abundantly tested, and as abundantly verified. But there is one notable exception —water. Take water at the temperature of 32° Fah. (*i.e.* precisely at the point when it is either just melted, or just ready to freeze), and measure its bulk exactly. Now warm it, so as to raise the temperature to 33°. According to the law of heat just described this should cause an increase in bulk. But no; the water has contracted. We raise it to 34°, there is still further contraction; and so

on till we reach a little above 39°, when the water is found to be actually $\frac{1}{8000}$th smaller in bulk than it was at 32°. The instant we pass this point the phenomenon is reversed, and further additions of heat produce expansion, just as they would with any other substance. There is no known liquid except water[3], which presents this phenomenon of contraction by heat; nor does water present it at any temperature higher than 40°. It certainly does not arise from any thing peculiar in the circumstances under which the experiment is tried; for we may vary the circumstances as we please, and place any other substance we please side by side with the water in conducting the experiment, and the exceptional character of the latter's behaviour remains precisely the same. There is no force known to be at work along with the heat to which the peculiarity can be ascribed. The phenomenon is simply inexplicable. What, then, do we conclude? That the law of heat in question is not a rigid, inexorable law; but whereas in other cases its tendency is to cause expansion, in this case it tends precisely the opposite way? This is impossible; for then what would become of

[3] The alloy known as fusible metal, and also sulphur, present somewhat similar phenomena among solids.

the uniformity of Natural law? Shall we then suppose that the matter of water has peculiar properties, which cause it to be acted upon by heat differently to all other matter? This also cannot well be; for water at all other temperatures is acted on by heat precisely as other matter is; whereas if its matter were differently related to heat, this difference ought to appear equally at all temperatures. One only alternative remains. We must assume that there is some force, antagonistic to expansion, present in water at 32°, which comes increasingly into action as the temperature rises, and overpowers the influence which the heat naturally has upon the water; but which force is exhausted when the temperature reaches 40°; after which the heat and the water have it all their own way. Such an assumption is, no doubt, intrinsically most improbable; but it is the only way in which science can regard the phenomenon, because on any other assumption Nature's uniformity must be sacrificed: a thing not improbable merely, but (on a scientific view) impossible.

The examples just given have been chosen purposely from departments of science among the most remarkable for the completeness and precision with which the phenomena they treat

of can be explained by Natural laws. Yet even here cases occur where these Natural laws appear to be contravened, and that in the most decided manner. It is hard to conceive a case which to an ordinary observer would seem more distinctly contradictions of Natural law than those just considered. Yet how are they regarded by men of science? No one rejects them as incredible, because of this apparent contradiction; that would be stupid. No one, on their account, renounces his belief in the uniformity of Nature, or regards that uniformity as one whit less rigid and inexorable than he did before; that would be unscientific. How, then, is the difficulty solved? It is solved by a confession of our *ignorance*. The matter and forces which we know were concerned in the phenomena, we believe to have acted in strict accordance with the properties and laws exhibited by them elsewhere; but inasmuch as these are insufficient to account for the phenomena, and would in fact, if the only elements concerned in its production, have led to phenomena essentially different, therefore we *assume* the existence along with these of other forces, or of forces acting according to other laws, as yet unknown to us, sufficient in character and power to make the

phenomena what they are. And we make this assumption simply because, but for it, we should have either to give up our belief in Nature's uniformity, or reject the phenomena as incredible; both of which alternatives involve far greater improbabilities than does the admission of our ignorance.

It may be laid down, then, as an axiom of scientific method, that whenever a phenomenon is observed, or reported as observed by trustworthy witnesses, which appears to contravene known Natural laws, the proper course is—not to reject the phenomenon as therefore incredible, still less to give up the idea of an absolute reign of law, but—to believe that it is our knowledge of Nature which is at fault, and to assume the existence of further laws, or properties, or matter, or forces, such as will account for the phenomenon. Science of course does not rest here, but proceeds at once to verify the assumption by seeking to ascertain *what* this unknown element in the phenomenon is, which it has thus been necessary to assume the existence of. Very often the endeavour has proved successful, and the discovery of the missing item of causation has amply vindicated its temporary assumption. In other cases no such success has as yet attended the efforts of

science; the assumption still remains such, and may remain so to the end of time. But no one thinks that this, any more than its original supposition, presents any difficulty to the scientific mind.

Cases like those above cited are far from rare. There is, however, another still commoner class which must receive a passing notice,—those, namely, which, though not involving any apparent contradiction with Natural law, yet are altogether inexplicable by it; cases, that is, in which we know that most or all of the essential elements involved are ones whose laws we are as yet utterly unacquainted with. To cite examples here is needless. Not isolated phenomena merely, but whole departments of science must plead guilty to being in this predicament. The extent of admitted ignorance in regard to Natural causation is at least equal to the extent of knowledge[4]. Whenever, then, our knowledge of Natural law is appealed to as a test whereby

[4] No doubt the progress of science is continually diminishing this ignorance; but it is also, by extending our acquaintance with phenomena, at the same time increasing our appreciation of the vast extent of the ignorance yet remaining; so that it may be doubted whether the proportion of recognized ignorance to knowledge is at all less, or likely in the future to be less, than it has been in past days.

to judge of the credibility of any phenomenon, our ignorance of Natural law must also be borne in mind. Nor is it allowable on the ground of the former to reject any thing which a reference to the latter would show to be credible.

This is the principle upon which scientific men invariably proceed in judging of the ordinary phenomena of Nature and Art. And this principle it is, and no other, by which we claim that miracles also should be judged. Let them be tried by the standard of Natural law by all means; but in applying that standard let it not be merely our knowledge of law which is appealed to, but let this appeal be ever balanced by the recollection of our ignorance. If a miracle can be shown to be a phenomenon so hopelessly opposed to the uniformity of Nature, that no assumption similar to those instanced above could reconcile its occurrence with that uniformity, then let this irreconcilability be allowed its full weight as an objection to belief. But if such an assumption would effect the required reconciliation in the case of a miracle, as we have seen it does in the case of other phenomena, then let the same measure of credence (so far, that is, as this question of causation is concerned) be

extended to both. We do not say, observe, let both be at once implicitly believed. In each case there is the value of the testimony to be considered, and weighed against the improbability of the assumption of ignorance required for belief. In the case of miracles there are several other matters beyond this, which would have to be considered before the general question of credibility could be decided on. All that is here contended for is, that no objection shall be allowed against miracles in respect of any apparent infraction of Natural law, which would be *disallowed* by scientific men in the case of ordinary phenomena. Or to put the matter in the shortest possible form, let not that be deemed a violation of law in a miracle, which would *not* be so deemed in a non-miracle.

The question, then, stands thus:—Is there any property or law discovered by science which is absolutely inconsistent with the occurrence of the miracles recorded in Scripture? And the means by which this is to be ascertained is by inquiring whether the matter and forces of Nature known to be engaged in any miracle could or could not have had their Natural influence in that miracle. If they could, then whatever assumption of other

forces or laws we have to make in order fully to account for them, still it cannot be said that Natural law was violated. But if they could not, then natural law was violated; and the miracle is really open to the objection brought against it. Let us look at some of the most remarkable miracles in detail, with a view to answer this question.

Take first those which had to do with external Nature. Many of these,—as the Deluge, the raining of fire upon Sodom, the swallowing up of Dathan and Abiram, the falling of the walls of Jericho, the fire from heaven which consumed Elijah's sacrifice, the sudden cessation of the storm on the lake of Gennesareth, the earthquakes which on more than one occasion liberated the Apostles from prison, and others like these,—resemble known occurrences of Nature far too closely for any one to cite them as instances of violations of law. We pass, then, to others which are of a more extraordinary character.

There are certain miracles which have been said to involve a violation of the law of gravitation, *e.g.* the passage of the Red Sea, and of the Jordan; the swimming of the iron axe-head that had sunk in the water; Christ's walking on the sea, and His ascension. But is it

so? Take any one of these instances, say the passage of the Jordan by the Israelites, and see what would follow if we suppose that gravitation was suspended. Why, had this been so, instead of the waters being merely stayed on their course, and piling themselves up until Israel had passed over, waters and Israelites together must, by the centrifugal influence of the earth's rotation, have been hurled headlong into space. So far, then, from the miracle requiring us to suppose gravitation to have been suspended for its occurrence, it requires us to suppose gravitation to have been in full force precisely as usual; for how else should Israel have been able to walk across? That the miracle requires the co-operation of some other force beside gravitation is clear. But the conjunction of a second force involves neither violation or suspension of the first, but only a modification of the result which the first alone would have produced. Natural law here is indeed (so far as we know it) insufficient to explain the miracle; but there is not the slightest reason for supposing it to have been violated. As well might we argue that because we cannot as yet completely explain the causes of the ascent of sap in trees (a phenomenon equally opposed to gravitation pure and simple), there-

fore we ought to regard the law of gravitation as violated there also.

It is clear that a similar line of reasoning with that pursued in the case of the passage of the Jordan will in like manner remove all ground of objection to the other miracles named. In nearly all some other force beside gravitation must be assumed, in none is there any reason to regard gravitation as violated. They need not, therefore, be discussed one by one.

There are, next, certain miracles which are thought to violate the laws regulating the motion of the heavenly bodies, viz., the standing still of the sun and moon, and the return of the shadow on the sun-dial of Ahaz. Much has been said as to the utter dislocation of the whole solar system which these miracles, and especially the former, would involve. And if they were brought about, as has been assumed, by the violation or suspension of fundamental laws, no doubt this would be the case. But if so, these results must have extended likewise to the earth; in fact, have been more marked there than any where else. Now the narrative of Scripture distinctly disallows the occurrence, along with the celestial phenomena named, of the terrible dislocation supposed by objectors to be involved in them. If, therefore, the

Scripture record of the miracles is to be heard in the matter (and beyond that we have simply no knowledge of them), they were not such miracles as these objectors suppose, *i.e.* they did *not* involve that violation of the laws of the solar system imagined, but were brought about in some other way. In other words, it is implied that the world generally went on just as usual, and therefore that Natural forces and laws were in action just as usual; only that here in Palestine some further modifying force was at work also, causing these phenomena to appear there, and there only[5]. To ascertain how this could be, it will be necessary to look at both miracles somewhat in detail.

What was it that Joshua desired when he commanded the sun and moon to stand still? It has been commonly assumed that he wanted a continuance of light. But to this there are several very serious objections. 1st. If so, why did he couple the moon with the sun? In daytime the light of the moon is inappreciable, and for Joshua's purpose therefore quite

[5] That the miracle of the shadow returning was confined to Palestine appears from 2 Chron. xxxii. 31, where it is said that the embassy from Babylon came to inquire concerning "the wonder that was done in the land," thus implying that they had not observed it at Babylon, but knew of it by report only.

useless. Yet both in his command, and in the notice of its fulfilment, sun and moon are put upon an equal footing, as if the standing of both was essential to his purpose. On one supposition only is this explicable, viz., that what Joshua desired was not light, but *darkness*, in which case both sunlight and moonlight would have been alike prejudicial. 2nd. The other particulars of the battle accord better with this idea of darkness, than with the prevalent one of light. It is said that during the battle there was a terrific hailstorm, so severe that more Canaanites were struck dead by the hailstones than fell by the sword. Such a storm presupposes a heaven covered with the thickest and blackest of clouds, such as would effectually obscure the light both of sun and moon. Now this hailstorm *preceded* the command of Joshua, and would seem to have been the occasion of it, from the way in which the two are linked together. It was thus after a period of intense darkness, bringing rout and slaughter upon the enemy, that Joshua spoke. And under such circumstances, which was he most likely to desire—light, or prolonged darkness[6]? 3rd. The duration assigned to the

[6] It may be objected that on this view there is no explanation of Joshua's naming certain *places* where the sun and

miracle fits in better with this idea than with the common one. It is said to have lasted "about a whole day." Now the battle began either at dawn, or probably rather before; for it is said that Joshua "came upon them suddenly," having gone up from Gilgal "all night." First came the slaughter of the unexpected attack, then the storm, then the command to the sun and moon, which issued in their standing-still "about a whole day"; *i. e.* all the day except that short space before the storm began. On the ordinary view the phrase is very ambiguous; for does it mean that the day was twice as long as usual, or that twelve hours of light elapsed from the time of the command, or what? It is impossible to decide from such an expression; whereas on this other view all is clear and straightforward. 4th. The expressions used concerning the sun and moon harmonize as well, and some of them much better, with this view than with the common one. There are three words used in the

moon were to stand. The answer is very simple. At the time of speaking both sun and moon must have been, at least for a moment, visible over the places named. Joshua, seeing them glancing out from the clouds, and perceiving the disadvantage which would ensue from their shining, bids them be still, and naturally in so doing addresses them as in the places where he sees them, "Sun in Gibeon" (thus the words run in the original), "be still," &c.

original, (1) דָּמַם (A. V. "stand still") is literally "be silent," an expression much better suited to denote darkness than light, and which, wherever it is used in Scripture in the sense of "stand," always implies passive standing, not active continuance. (2) עָמַד (A. V. "stayed") is either "stood," "stood up," or "continued" *i. e.* "stood as before." Its meaning here is hence somewhat ambiguous, since it might mean either "continued shining," or "continued obscured," just according to which state of things had been prevailing up to that time. It is to be observed that this is the word used in Hab. iii. 11, to describe the sun and moon being obscured during a tremendous thunder-storm, a passage which many think refers to this miracle, yet which all are agreed, notwithstanding, describes a darkening of the sun and moon, not a continuance of their light. Whether there be a reference to Joshua's miracle or not, this much at all events is clear, —the word in question is one perfectly appropriate to describe a darkening of the heavenly bodies such as is here supposed. (3) לֹא־אָץ לָבוֹא (A. V. "hasted not to go down") is properly "hasted not to go," the word "go" being one with a very wide range of application, and which would as naturally mean "come"

or "go on," as "go down." Its precise sense must in every case be decided by the context, which we have seen here favours the second meaning rather than the last. On every ground, therefore, it would appear that the miracle was not, as usually supposed, a miracle of prolonged light, but of prolonged darkness. Such a darkness plainly involves no dislocation of the solar system, nor any violation of Natural laws; for the cause hinted at, the storm-clouds, is both sufficient and reasonable, and involves no infraction of uniformity.

Next as to the return of the shadow on Ahaz' sun-dial. It is said that the shadow went back "ten degrees," or more properly "ten steps;" for the sun-dial intended seems to have consisted of a flight of steps so arranged that when the day dawned a shadow fell on all the flight, but as the sun mounted higher step after step was illumined, so that the time could be told from the number of steps on which the shadow still fell. What is implied in the miracle is that the shadow, having left the lower steps, came back over ten of them in a way it would not naturally have done at that time of day; thus indicating that, so far as the dial was concerned, the apparent vertical motion of the sun's light was temporarily reversed. Does

this necessarily involve an equivalent reversal of the earth's motion on its axis? Not at all; there are at least two other ways in which such a phenomenon might have been brought about. 1st, it might have been occasioned by the upheaval of one end of the dial, or the sinking of the other, increasing for a time the angle of its slope; which would instantly cause the shadow to recede. Considering the frequency of earthquakes in Syria such an explanation cannot be regarded as involving any thing improbable. But, 2nd, it might possibly also have been occasioned by a solar eclipse, supposing such an eclipse to have occurred shortly before noon, and the portion of the limb obscured to have been the upper part. For in such a case, the apparent upward motion of the sun being extremely small, the cutting off of the light from the upper part of the limb would be equivalent to a slight lowering of the sun's position in the heavens as measured by one of these eastern dials. Every thing of course here turns upon whether an eclipse exactly of this kind actually occurred at the time specified. Nor is such a coincidence altogether without evidence in its favour; for an eclipse of the kind required has been calculated by astronomers to have occurred at a date which agrees precisely with

that which some chronologers take to be the date of Hezekiah's illness. The calculation of a solar eclipse at so distant a period is, however, beset with too many difficulties, and the chronology of this part of Jewish history too much controverted, to allow of our insisting on this as even a probable explanation. One thing, however, is clear,—there is no necessity for supposing any law of Nature to have been violated or set aside for the occurrence of this miracle of the shadow; and this is all that we are here concerned with.

We pass on, then, in the next place to some miracles which seem to violate the laws of heat, viz., the non-consumption of the burning-bush, the lighting and non-lighting of dew on two successive nights on Gideon's fleece, and the preservation of the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace. Two of these, the first and the last, may be dismissed with a word. Science has shown in the most striking way, as already pointed out (pp. 56, 57), that intense heat may co-exist even with intense cold, and that with the heated and cold substances almost in contact, without any violation of Natural law, nay, as a direct consequent of law. That these phenomena of science are precisely parallel, and explain the miracles in question, we by no

means assert. But they show clearly that such apparent non-action of fire is possible, without any Natural law being interfered with; which is all we have here to consider. The case of Gideon's fleece presents as little difficulty. True, if there were nothing concerned in the miracle but the properties of wool and soil, and the laws of the condensation of dew, such opposite results could not have occurred. But how easily would the introduction of some other element alter the phenomena. It needs but that from some unusual cause the temperature of the wool should one night be maintained just above the dew-point, and in like manner on the other night the temperature of the ground; and all is clear. Will any one venture to say that to do this would necessitate a violation of Natural law? The phenomena might easily be imitated by arrangements well within the power of science; and does science work by violations of law?

The last group of miracles, wrought mainly on external Nature, are those which seem to involve a creation, or at all events a sudden transformation, of matter. Such are the turning of Moses' rod into a serpent, of the Nile-water into blood, and of dust into lice; the giving of water from the rocks, and of manna,

in the wilderness; the healing of the bitter waters by Moses, and again of the same and also of the poisonous pottage by Elisha; the multiplication of meal and oil by Elijah, of bread and oil by Elisha, and on a still grander scale of bread and fish by Christ; and the turning of water into wine. All these miracles involve a difficulty of the same kind, though varied in form. It is, hence, unnecessary to discuss more than one in detail. We take as our example the miracle of feeding the 5000.

That the bread and fish with which this multitude was fed were similar to ordinary bread and fish, is clearly implied in the narrative. There is, hence, no violation of law so far. The matter of which each was composed, and the forces and laws by which each was bound together, and which gave to each its nourishing power, all these were the same in the food miraculously produced as in that which was Naturally supplied. The violation of law, if any, must lie in the way in which the production was brought about. Now whence the matter came of which the fresh bread and fish was constituted, we know not. But assuming that it came (as for all the essentials of bread and fish it well might) from the moist air of

the neighbourhood, is there any thing here inconsistent with Natural law? On the contrary, it is certain that from air and moisture all the most essential constituents of bread and fish are ultimately derived in the natural course of events. But it will be said, the manner and means of production is vitally different. True; but different in what way? Can we point to any force concerned in the production of this miraculous food, which was acting (if the miracle be true) in opposition to its Natural laws? On the contrary, we simply do not know what forces were at work; and to talk of any of their laws being violated is hence impossible. The difference is simply this:—We know of but one way in which such substances as those composing bread can be built up from the simpler constituents of the air and moisture, and that is the agency of a living plant. A similar agency, with that of animal life superadded, is the only known way in which the substance of a fish can be produced. It is certain that the bread and fish in the miracle were not thus produced. But what then? Are we justified in asserting that the way we know of is the only way in which bread and fish could be produced? Certainly not; and this for two reasons. First: the production by living agency

is a process which science has so far failed to unravel. We do not even know what forces there are in the plant and animal which effect the changes in question, still less do we know the amount and kind of influence which each contributes, or the laws under which it acts. What part that mysterious influence called vital force plays in the production; whether indeed it is essential, or whether all may not be due to that collocation of ordinary forces which act (apparently) under its guidance;—on all these points science can as yet give us no information. Since then, we cannot even affirm that living agency is an essential ingredient in the mode of production we do know, but only that it is a constant one; still less can we dare to assert that without it no production after any other mode could take place. Second: it is certain that several substances, which for a long time it was supposed could only be produced by the intervention of living agency, have been of late produced in other and independent ways. That others will or may be so produced, is highly probable. And though the methods so far employed are often cumbrous and round-about, still the conclusion to be drawn is none the less clear, viz. that vital agency is *not* an indispensable condition. To

call the miracles of the loaves and fishes a violation of the laws of Nature, because it asserts the production of certain kinds of organic matter without the intervention of that living agency which we every where see associated with them, is, in the face of these facts, altogether unwarrantable. It is a phenomenon unaccountable by Natural laws certainly, but involving no necessary inconsistency with them.

In few of the other miracles of this group is the difficulty as great as in that just discussed; in many it is far less; known Natural causes being available for their explanation to a much greater extent. Thus the development of lice from dust, the turning of the Nile-water into blood (a metaphorical way, probably, of expressing the water's becoming red and loathsome), and the springing of water from the rock, all have analogies in Nature, which preclude any idea of violation of law. And so of others, in different ways.

We come, then, to the second great group of miracles;—those which were wrought upon *man*. These are partly physical, partly mental. Of the latter class (including revelation in all its various forms, and some others, as the casting out of demons, &c.), it is unnecessary here to speak; for mental laws are confessedly

beyond the province of physical science, with whose objections only we are at present concerned. The former sort, physical miracles on man, are among the most numerous and important recorded in Scripture, comprising all miracles of healing, of sudden disease, of renewed life, and of penal death, besides a few cases of miraculous birth, and of life preserved under extraordinary circumstances.

In regard to the major part of these one observation will suffice. Disease and healing, life and death, are phenomena with which we are necessarily most familiar. But of the laws which govern them, either singly or in their relation to one another, we are for the most part profoundly ignorant. Whether any particular case that comes under notice conforms to Natural law or not, we are for the most part quite unable to judge. We believe that it does so, not on account of any proper knowledge on the point, but on account of our general belief that *all* phenomena are so conformed. When, then, we come to a miracle of this class we are really in the same position. We have no knowledge of how precisely it was brought about (*i.e.* by what combination of forces, acting under what laws), but only that it was brought about. And believing that all phenomena are

rigidly controlled by law, we assume that here also law was in full force; an assumption surely as allowable in this case as elsewhere, our ignorance being scarcely, if at all, more profound. No doubt the one set of phenomena are common, the other rare; but that this is no reason against making such an assumption has been amply shown before.

Even in the extreme case of all, that of resurrection, it cannot be said that Natural law is violated. It is not very long ago since a paper was read before the Royal Society, and printed in their Proceedings[7], containing the accounts of a series of experiments directed to this very end—to see whether it was possible to resuscitate life in a dead body. The experiments were reported as, so far, failures; but the mere fact of their being undertaken, and still more of the account of them being received and published by such a Society, is sufficient proof that such resuscitation is not deemed in the scientific world to involve any necessary violation of Natural law.

One case only remains where the assertion of law being violated has some show of plausibility; that, namely, of the preservation of Jonah in the fish's belly for three days. Surely,

[7] Proc. Royal Soc. 1865, vol. xiv. p. 358.

it may be said, it is a law of human life that respiration is essential to continued existence; and how could respiration possibly have gone on in the stomach of a fish? True; but then what warrant have we for saying that it did? The whole of what Scripture tells us on the point is (1), that Jonah was swallowed up alive, (2), that he was cast out alive, and (3), that he was aware of what went on during the interval. It is our inference merely that he was alive (in a bodily sense) during this interval. The language of Scripture, which every where speaks of personality as belonging to the soul, not to the body, in no way requires such bodily life; while there is much, both in the prayer of Jonah, and in the New Testament references to the miracle [8], which points to bodily death as having in fact intervened. Thus regarded, the miracle becomes one, among many others, of resurrection, and all peculiar difficulty is at an end.

How, then, stands the case as regards miracles? We saw that the only instance in which we should be justified in asserting Nature's laws to have been violated was where some force or matter known to be at work could be shown to have acted contrary to the laws and properties universally valid for it elsewhere.

[8] Jonah ii. 2, 6. Matt. xii. 39, 40.

Have we found such an instance among the miracles recorded in Scripture? There were abundant instances where Natural law, so far as we know it, altogether failed to account for the phenomena; indeed this was, as might have been expected, the rule with miracles. But there was no instance in which it could be asserted that any force or matter known to be at work had an action certainly contrary to Natural law. All that was required to harmonize miracles with law was the assumption that the elements we know to have been at work were not all those which *were* at work; an assumption which is simply another way of confessing our ignorance, and at the same time refusal on account of ignorance to give up our scientific faith in the uniformity of Nature. Such assumptions we saw to be both common and considerable, even in the best known departments of science, and to be regarded by men of science as involving less improbability than the rejection of even moderate testimony. In claiming to make such assumptions in regard to miracles we are asking no more than is granted readily, and as a matter of course, in regard to myriads of phenomena which science is conversant with, and about whose credibility there is no question. To reject miracles on this account,

when other things to which the objection equally applies are unhesitatingly accepted as presenting no difficulty, is an unfairness which surely needs but to be mentioned to be repudiated by every one. So far, then, as the laws of Nature are concerned there appears to be no reason whatever to discredit miracles.

It has been taken for granted throughout this argument, (1) that the external actions preceding miracles (*e. g.* the lifting of Moses' rod, or the touch of Christ's hand) are not at all events the *sole* cause of the miracles' occurrence; and (2) that the further causes which were concerned in their occurrence were (proximately) Natural forces similar, if not indeed the very same, with those concerned in ordinary phenomena.

On the first of these points it is unnecessary to dwell. As well might one assume that the turning of the handle of a telegraph-machine was the whole cause of the message travelling along the wires, or that the alteration of a railway-signal was the whole cause of the train stopping and moving on, as suppose the outward acts accompanying miracles to have been the whole causes of their occurrence. In no instance can such outward acts be regarded as any thing more than permissive or directive causes which

called the really efficient causes into action while in many cases they were mere signals to call attention to what was to follow, and connect the miracle with its moral purpose.

The second point is more open to dispute; since to dogmatize on the nature of that, of which we confessedly know nothing, may well seem unwarrantable. Clearly, however, the assumption made above is the most natural that can be made, and that which harmonizes best both with analogy, with the circumstances of the case, and with the language of Scripture. We know, as a fact, that in every phenomenon which science has yet analyzed completely into its constituents, the whole effect has been produced through the instrumentality of Natural causes. We believe that the same is true of all other Natural phenomena, and this belief science is perpetually confirming and verifying by new discoveries. Miracles, then, being phenomena in Nature (albeit not part of Nature's ordinary course), may most naturally be regarded in the same way. If it is God's pleasure to order Nature's common occurrences through the instrumentality of secondary causes, surely it is most reasonable to suppose that He would use the same causes to bring about *uncommon* occurrences in the same field. Again, it is certain

that the state of things immediately preceding and immediately succeeding every miracle was a state in which Natural causes were exercising their usual influence. The character of nearly every miracle requires us to suppose further, that some at least of these causes were at work during its occurrence, as well as before and after. To suppose, then, that all that was done was to introduce some additional causes of the same nature, is on this ground also the simplest supposition that can be made; for we are thus assuming that what we do not know in the causation of miracles was of the same nature as what we do know. Lastly, as remarked at starting (pp. 78—82), this view seems most in accordance with Scripture language, which speaks of God's relation to miracles in terms practically identical with that in which His relation to Nature generally is spoken of.

The objections to this way of regarding miracles are twofold—1st, it is said that these Natural causes are insufficient, and that we must therefore bring in some other proximate cause not belonging to Nature; 2nd, it is said that except we do this we destroy the sharp line of distinction between miracles and non-miracles, reducing both to the same level. As to the first objection, the fact that it is based

entirely upon ignorance, and that we have nothing but ignorance to go upon in replying to it, puts an end to all possibility of directly meeting it. It must suffice for the present to remark, that if our inability to explain fully the occurrence of miracles from Natural causes is a valid ground for assuming the intervention of a non-Natural cause, then the same principle ought in fairness to be applied equally to all those numerous ordinary phenomena which we are in like manner unable fully to explain; the effect of which would be to destroy the distinction between miracles and non-miracles far more effectually than the view here taken can possibly do.

We turn now to the second and more weighty difficulty. It may best be met by bringing forward the next stage or phase of the Deistical objection; for the basis of this latter is precisely the existence of such a distinction between miracles and non-miracles as the former desiderates, but which the preceding argument is thought by both to ignore. We may conceive the disbeliever in miracles arguing thus:—True, it has been shown that you cannot lay your finger upon any particular item in the causation of a miracle, and say, Here is a specific property of the matter involved, or here

a specific law of one of the forces at work, which the miracle violates. True, also, that you cannot fairly reject a miracle merely because its occurrence from Natural causes cannot be fully explained. But the view here taken of the reign of law is not *all* that we understand by Nature's uniformity; and it is against the part omitted that miracles militate. When we speak of Nature's uniformity we mean—not only that every single event in Nature is brought about exclusively by Natural causes acting in rigid conformity to law, but—that *no* events are brought about *other* than the results of preceding events would, in accordance with law, of necessity occasion. It is not merely the constitution of phenomena internally, but the determination of phenomena externally, which we regard as governed by law; and this external law it is,—of what phenomena shall find place in Nature,—which miracles violate. Granted, that they violate no law within the sphere of their own causation; granted even, that combinations of Natural causes are possible by which they might have been brought about; still in Nature, so long as law ruled, no such combinations would ever have occurred, and therefore the existence of such combinations implies that law has not ruled, or in other words, that law has been violated.

The fact here asserted, that Nature alone would never have brought about the combination of causes adequate to produce a miracle, may be freely conceded. Whether science is as yet quite in a position to make the assertion might perhaps be doubted; but about this we need not trouble ourselves. The question before us is, does this fact of miracles being phenomena occurring in Nature, yet no part of Nature's proper course, warrant the conclusion that miracles violate law, and are consequently incredible? The fact itself, that miracles are phenomena such as Nature alone would never have produced, plainly does away entirely with the objection noticed above, as to the lack of distinction between miracles and non-miracles, this distinction being taken as the common ground of the present argument. With that objection, therefore, it is unnecessary to deal further. We turn to the question to which the adoption of this common ground gives rise.

If the principle laid down in the above objection is true, it must of course apply generally, as well as to the particular case of miracles. It must be affirmed, that is, as a universal proposition, that every phenomenon occurring in Nature, other than Nature left to itself would

occasion, is a violation of law, and hence incredible. Is this so? Take the case of a locomotive drawing a railway train. There is no question that the locomotive is a phenomenon in Nature, and every motion of its every part may be traced proximately to Natural causes, which in their action conform precisely with Natural law. So far it resembles perfectly what we call Natural phenomena. But is it a phenomenon which Nature left to itself would ever have brought about? Most surely not; it requires besides Nature the action of *mind*. If we trace back the origin of the locomotive, step by step, we find a great number of Natural causes concerned in its production, to which Natural causes the whole of the production without any exception can be ascribed, until we reach at last in a variety of ways the agency of man. We examine that agency, and find that in part it also is resolvable into Natural causes acting according to Natural law. Man acts by his muscles, which are directed by his nerves. The former of these have been shown, the latter probably will be shown, to be in the strictest sense Natural agents. But here our analysis stops, at the threshold of the great mystery—mind's action on matter and material forces. This passes the domain of physical science; and this

it is which, in conjunction with Natural causes, has brought about the phenomenon of the locomotive. It is important to observe exactly how it has done this. In none of its multifarious actions tending to this end has mind created a single atom of matter or iota of force. Whatever of either has entered into the various stages of the production has been drawn entirely from Nature. Further: in using this matter and force mind has imposed no new law, suspended or modified no old one; whatever has been done, has been done in the strictest accordance with the universal law of Nature. What then has mind done which Nature alone could not do? It has done this one thing only—given a particular direction to one of Nature's forces (that namely, whatever it is, which is engaged in nervous action), which reacting on matter in conjunction with other forces, acting no otherwise than as Nature leads them to, caused all those phenomena which issued in the locomotive drawing the railway-train. The action of mind on Nature is thus exceedingly limited; 1st, by the fact that it can only act through the body, and hence that only so far as the Natural powers of the body go can it act at all; 2nd, by the fact that it can only act directly on *one* of the forces of the body, and hence that only

so far as the other forces are controlled by this can it affect them; 3rd, by the fact that in regard to this one it can do nothing but direct its action in one or other of a few determinate lines, without the slightest power to call it forth if lacking, or send it on any other errand than that which the nature of the nervous system allows. Yet, though thus limited in its power and mode of action, what wondrous modifications of Nature has mind wrought! Looking at the world generally, and especially at those parts of it which we call civilized, is it too much to say that a very large proportion of the phenomena which we see are the products in part of mind?—that is, are such as, but for mind, Nature alone would not have brought about? To ask whether these things are incredible would be absurd. It is clear, that granting the existence of *mind*, there both may be and are myriads of phenomena occurring in Nature, which Nature alone could never have produced; and this without the slightest violation of Natural law. But if so, then all that is required to make miracles (in this respect) credible is the assumption that they too are phenomena in which *mind* has been concerned, with a similar directive modifying influence.

Before proceeding to the new stage of the

inquiry in which we are thus landed, it is necessary to deal briefly with some objections to the preceding argument. The first of these is purely verbal, and turns upon the use of the word Nature. Our argument has distinguished between phenomena brought about by Nature only, and by Nature directed within certain limits by man's mind. Now it may be said: Is not man's mind properly a part of Nature; and ought not therefore his works and acts to be called Natural, as much as those in which he has no part? No doubt in one sense man's mind is a part of Nature, nor would the above argument be in the least degree affected were its language altered to suit this view. The distinction between mind, and the ordinary forces concerned in phenomena, is a real one however it is expressed; and upon that the whole argument turns. We should simply have to substitute "physical" or "material" for "Natural," and the result arrived at would be precisely the same. Natural, however, seems the most appropriate term, 1st, because of the common distinction between "natural" and "artificial," which separates sharply between works produced by human agency and others, restricting "natural" to the latter and 2nd, because the current scientific use of

the word Nature does certainly exclude mind from its contents.

The second objection is vital to the whole question, since it denies that any distinction whatever can be drawn between *mind* and the physical forces of Nature. According to this view (that of the materialists) man has properly no mind at all; but what we call the mind is simply the brain, or nervous system generally, which acts and is acted upon by material forces in the same way as any other material object might be; the peculiar phenomena it produces being solely due to the peculiarity of its structure and organization, and the relation of these to the forces acting on it. Of course on such a view the argument just drawn out breaks down utterly; but so, also, does the whole inquiry of which that argument is part. If man is nothing more than a complex and delicate machine, a mere automaton, to discuss whether he can believe in miracles is absurd. Scripture speaks of man as having a soul, and it is for his soul's sake that it describes miracles as having been wrought. If, then, he has no soul, the question is settled at once; of course there were no miracles. We do not ask or expect, therefore, any one who holds this materialistic view, of man being a mere machine, to believe in mira-

cles. Nor is it proposed to enter at all into a discussion of the view itself, since this would lead us altogether away from the proper subject in hand. The distinctness of the mind from the material order of things is an ultimate fact in each man's personal knowledge of himself. If any one has it not, or having it refuses to acknowledge its authority, the most that can be done is to appeal to the consensus of human belief against such an one, or proceed by an *ad hominem* argument to show that if he rejects this he ought, if consistent, no less to reject the existence of matter and material force,—in fact to believe in nothing. But this would lead us into metaphysics.

Putting the materialist on one side, therefore, as one to whom the whole question is necessarily a nonentity, without relevance or meaning, we deal for the future only with those who believe that they have a mind and are not mere material machines. Some of these, however, deny that the mind is free to act; a denial which some regard as equally inconsistent with the argument under consideration, and which therefore may be regarded as a third objection. A very few words will suffice to show that it is an objection only in appearance. The popular necessitarian view of the present day, which

puts the difficulty in its most plausible and extremest form, is this :—The actions of the mind upon the nervous system are the direct and necessary consequence of previous actions of the nervous system (by way of sensation, &c.) upon the mind; each complex action *upon* the mind leading as inexorably to one certain action *of* the mind, as if mind were but a part of the chain of Natural causes. This may seem to be a doctrine very similar to that of the materialists just noticed. But in truth it is very different; for it admits fully that mind is not a material cause, and that effects flow from its intervention which would not have happened from the mere collocation of forces acting upon it; whereas the materialist's view regards so-called mind as the mere aggregate of these Natural causes, producing no effect but such as their material character directly occasioned. All that the necessitarian does, in fact, is to add another limitation of the mind's action to those above laid down (pp. 132, 133),—the limitation namely, that it can only act when excited from without, and in exact accordance with the nature of the excitement. But that the effects which mind produces when excited differ from those which would have been produced had Natural causes been the only things at work—

this is freely admitted; and this is the point on which our argument turns. Although, therefore, the denial of free-will may lessen somewhat the apparent analogy between human acts and miracles, yet as it does not touch the essential point under discussion we may safely dismiss the objection without expressing any opinion on its intrinsic merits or demerits.

The case stands thus, then:—There are in Nature myriads of phenomena which, though in strict accordance with Natural law, and energized entirely by Natural causes, yet would never have occurred had these Natural causes been the only agents at work. Whatever objection is raised to miracles on this latter ground applies with equal force to these occurrences also. But in the case of these it is allowed no weight at all, because the controlling action of mind is recognized as fully sufficient to account for the divergence from Nature's proper order. Admit, then, the action of mind in the case of miracles, and the objection to them is in like manner altogether at an end. They are, on this assumption, as unexceptionable phenomena as the works of man on the assumption of his mental activity. Of course it is not human mind which we require to assume to make miracles credible.

They are not only supernatural, but superhuman. The mind which directed their occurrence was GOD.

We have called this an assumption requisite or the credibility of miracles, because it is in this aspect that the course of our inquiry has brought it before us. To regard it, however, merely as an assumption necessitated by the exigencies of argument would be most misleading. It is, we saw at starting, an essential and most important part of the claim of Scripture on behalf of miracles, that they were wrought by the special intervention of God. We are not asked to believe in them in any other light. The position we have arrived at really, therefore, comes to this :—If the account which Scripture gives of the causation of miracles is true, then in respect to causation miracles are perfectly credible. There is no objection to be urged against them, which does not apply with equal force to numbers of phenomena credited unhesitatingly by the most sceptical. This account of Scripture has been tested now in two ways. It describes miracles as coming from the same ultimate Author as Nature does, and as standing to Him in a similar relation. To see if this is so, miracles have been compared in detail with Nature, and

it has been found that both in respect to the laws governing them, and the causes (probably) producing them, they are quite in harmony with Nature; the opinions to the contrary entertained by some having been shown to be untenable. That miracles should have proceeded from the same Author as other Natural phenomena is a proposition, then, which involves no difficulty. But though in harmony with Nature, miracles cannot be accounted for by Nature only; they require besides the assumption of a directing power exerted by a superhuman mind. Now this is precisely the remaining element in the Scriptural claim,—that miracles owed their occurrence to the special intervention of God. In this respect, also, then, there is harmony. Do but grant the agency alleged in Scripture, and the occurrence of miracles is perfectly credible.

And here we may just take up again for a moment the only objection to our argument left undiscussed above,—the supposed insufficiency of Natural causes to bring about miracles. We know how wonderful, and how diverse from Nature's order, are the phenomena which man's intervention is capable of producing. We have seen how limited is the sphere, and mode of acting, of the directive influence by which man

does this. But with God there can be no such limitations. Every where, at every time, His control is capable of acting, and that on every force of Nature, without check or hindrance. If man, then, can do so much, and Natural causes become in his hands sufficient to accomplish things so unlike what Nature ordinarily presents us with, how much more can God do by such directive influence, and how much more sufficient must Natural causes be in His hands, to accomplish things still more marvellous and above Nature's usual course. Concede only that there is a God, and that He chose to use the power over Nature which as God He must possess, and the causation of miracles is as credible as that of the commonest events of our every-day life.

But will this be conceded? It involves two assertions, to each of which objections have been made. There are some who refuse to concede that there is a God. There are still more who refuse to concede that He chose to use His power on behalf of miracles. With the latter of these positions we have at present nothing to do. It concerns the purpose and motive of miracles, not their possibility as effects of a given cause. Its discussion belongs, therefore, to the next chapter. Not so

the former. This cuts at the root of the whole question of causation, and is the extremest form of disbelief to which miracles can possibly be subject. Leaving, then, the Deistical line of objection for the present, we turn to this, the Atheistical.

The exact form in which it generally presents itself now-a-days is to be carefully noted. There are but few who go so far as positively to deny that there is a God, or who attempt to produce evidence for such a denial. The majority of those, whom for convenience we class together as Atheists, content themselves with denying that we *know* there is a God, and with showing (as they think) that the evidence commonly relied on to prove that there is one, is insufficient. This distinction is of great importance, for although the latter position is the one actually taken up by the larger number, it is the former which is really required to give validity to the argument against miracles.

The basis of the reasoning is of course Nature. It is said that Nature is so constituted that its phenomena do not *require* us to believe in a God; the reign of law is quite sufficient to account for all that we see, without God. On the other hand, miracles do require us to believe in God, for they cannot be accounted for on

any other supposition. Nature and miracles, therefore, are inconsistent.

Now this is a manifest fallacy. For what this argument needs as its basis is—not that Nature does not require us to believe in God, but—that Nature requires us *not to believe*, which is a very different thing. To say that Natural law is sufficient to account for Natural phenomena without God, is simply to say that there is another alternative beside that of God's being, which adequately explains them. But the existence of such an alternative is no proof that God is not; it only shows that, if this be so, we cannot determine the question of His existence from Nature alone.

Take a simple illustration by way of parallel. On the slope of some hill a long straight mound is observed forming a kind of terrace. It is thought by some to be the work of man, part it may be of a Roman encampment. But to this it is objected by others that a landslip, or some such Natural cause, would fully account for the mound without calling in human agency at all. While the matter is in this doubtful case, the discovery is announced of some antiquity connected with the mound which, if genuine, would prove it to be of Roman origin. If, now, the advocates of its

Natural origin were to argue that because the mound did not *require* human agency, but the alleged antiquity did, therefore the two were inconsistent; and the mound being well known and certain, while the antiquity was only reported of, therefore the latter ought to be discredited as a forgery;—what would be thought of such an argument? Would it not be laughed at as absurd? Yet is it nothing but a fair instance of exactly similar reasoning with that relied on by many to prove that miracles are incredible[9]. The natural mode of reasoning would surely be to argue from the clear to the doubtful, and say that because the antiquity discovered was Roman, therefore the mound was so also. And so, by parity of reasoning, that because miracles unquestionably required Divine agency, therefore Nature also is to be

[9] Of course the illustration is not perfect. In the case supposed, human agency was an admitted fact on both sides, the only dispute being as to its presence or absence in regard to a particular phenomenon. Whereas in the case of Nature and miracles the dispute is whether there is such a thing as Divine agency at all. But, on the other hand, it is to be observed that in the case of the illustration, it was *also* an admitted fact that Natural causes were sufficient to account for the phenomenon without intelligent agency, which is *not* an admitted fact in regard to Nature. The parallel, therefore though incomplete, is as fair to one side as to the other, the two points of difference sufficiently balancing one another.

ascribed to the same cause. The only answer to this would be that Nature cannot be so ascribed. In other words, that Natural phenomena are such as to render it positively incredible that there is a God. But this position is precisely that which disbelievers do not dare to take up.

Here, then, so far as the question of bare credibility is concerned, we might safely leave the argument; the position taken up by unbelievers being one which cannot prove miracles incredible, and the only position which could do so being one which they do not take up. But the sceptical premises, though they do not warrant this extreme conclusion, yet do warrant (if true) another conclusion of no little importance,—namely, that the whole burden of proof that there is a God must rest upon miracles; since clearly, if Nature can be accounted for without God, His existence must not be assumed as already conceded in arguing for the credibility of miracles. Now Scripture in describing miracles does assume this as already conceded; assumes, that is, that Nature's relation to God is an admitted fact before the miracle takes place, and hence that by that relation the miracle may be explained. Of miracles designed to prove God's existence to those

who did not already allow it, we find none in Scripture. Whether, therefore, this allegation be correct, that Nature can be sufficiently accounted for without God, is a matter of very considerable importance, as determining whether we have a right to assume God's relation to Nature as an explanation of miracles, or whether it is necessary to prove this relation from miracles themselves [1].

We have seen that all Natural phenomena are resolved by science into the mutual action of various kinds of matter and force in accordance with fixed law. In many cases the belief

[1] In thus stating the alternative it may seem as if the moral grounds for believing in God's existence (viz., those founded on our sense of dependence, of responsibility, of absolute right and wrong, &c.,) were overlooked. They are not adduced, because, attentively considered, such moral grounds appear to be incompetent to touch the point at issue. However strong our convictions might be of the existence of a supreme Moral Ruler, this would not afford any necessary presumption that He was also Ruler of Nature, except the existence of the latter was probable on independent grounds, in which case the harmony observed between the two systems would be a fair reason for concluding the Moral Governor and the Ruler of Nature to be *one*. But if there were no independent grounds for supposing a Ruler of Nature to exist, the mere belief in a Moral Governor would not afford sufficient warrant for supposing one, as there exists no necessary connexion between the two ideas. The existence of a Ruler of Nature must be established, therefore, either from miracles (including, of course, revelation), or from Nature's own evidence.

that this is so is founded upon analogy, the precise constituents of the phenomena being unknown. But wherever these are known, there it invariably appears that these three elements —matter, force, and law—are sufficient to account for the phenomena. To conclude from this that all Nature is to be accounted for in the same way, seems but a reasonable inference. And so long as we regard detached phenomena the inference is just. But when we come to Nature as a whole, then it is clear that matter, force, and law, do not and cannot account for all. In the first place they cannot account for their own existence. In the second place they cannot account for the fact of their being actively at work, not merely passive or in equilibrium. In the third place they cannot account for the adaptation of their results to certain ends, and especially to the welfare of man and other living beings. There are other things beside these, belonging to particular sciences, which are also unaccounted for, but of which we need not speak. It will be enough briefly to point out the bearing of the three general points enumerated, which are true equally of all science.

Firstly then, matter, force, and law, do not account for their own existence. This is too self-evident to need comment. None of the

phenomena observable in Nature have, or, as far as we can see, ever can have, a creative power. They consist entirely of combinations, decompositions, transformations, but never of creation or annihilation. If, therefore, the existence of matter, force, and law, is to be accounted for, it must be by the assumption of some other influence outside them, and capable of doing things altogether beyond their power. In this way Nature would point to a Creator. The argument, however, so long as it stands alone, cannot be pressed; for it is by no means clear that the existence of matter, force, and law, is a point which the human mind feels ought to be accounted for. That their existence is not *necessary* (*i.e.* that their non-existence would not be deemed incredible), is manifest, but on the other hand neither does their eternity present any difficulty to the mind. In fact, if we weigh one against the other the two alternatives—to believe these things to have existed always, and to believe them to have come into existence at some definite time—most minds will probably (so long as the idea of God is kept out of view) find the former easier than the latter. It is not until we have got the idea of God that the difficulties of Nature's eternity come strongly forward, and

we are led to the belief in creation. But if so, then it is clear that we cannot in this way get at the idea of God.

But, secondly, the existence of matter, force, and law, does not account for their being in action, rather than passive or in equilibrium; and this is a point which the human mind feels *must* be accounted for, before it can be satisfied. When we see a thing at rest (except that rest implies previous motion), we do not feel impelled to ask, how came it to be at rest?—that it should be so seems quite natural, and needs no explanation. But when we see a thing *move*, we are at once impelled to ask (if we do not already know), why does it move? what makes it move? Motion, or to put it in a wider form *action*, is a thing which demands explanation. There is an effect; there must, therefore, be a cause. Whereas passive rest, *i.e.* either mere existence, or equilibrium, does not, as we have seen, thus necessarily demand to be accounted for. This being, then, a law of the human mind,—that wherever it discerns action, there it feels that there is something to be accounted for,—we ask, how far does science satisfy this feeling? The recognition of this feeling, and desire to satisfy it, are the very

mainsprings of science[2]; but how far is the desire accomplished? Phenomena are analyzed into particular combinations of matter and force controlled by law, and these are rightly said to be the causes of the phenomena. But then they were causes already in action before the phenomena took place; for, if not, they would have had no power to produce such effects. It was just because they were acting that they were causes. But being things in action they also in like manner need to be accounted for. How came they to be in action? Thus we are led back to another set of causes, which also being things in action require causes for themselves. And so on, step by step; till at last we are fain to stop, not because the difficulty is removed, but simply because the links of causation have passed out of our sight. It matters not how many these links are, the real thing we are seeking for is as far off at the end as it was at the beginning. Each link, no doubt, accounts thoroughly for all that succeed it, but inasmuch as it stands in precisely the same position of needing to be

[2] "The validity of all the Inductive Methods depends on the assumption that every event, or the beginning of every phenomenon, must have some cause." J. S. Mill, System of Logic, Bk. III. ch. xxi. § 1. 7th ed., 1868.

accounted for that the others did, the difficulty is not lessened in the least.

But, it will be said: Do not Natural laws solve this difficulty?—is it not these which determine matter and force to action? Such an idea can only come from an utter confusion of mind as to what Natural laws are. They are, in brief, nothing more than our expressions for the uniform manner in which matter and force act, and, as we believe, must act. But laws of the manner of acting are altogether different from, and in no way imply, laws *causing to act.* Because it is a law that heat of certain intensity will melt ice, it by no means follows that ice will ever actually be melted, for that this should happen requires further that the heat and the ice should be brought in contact. When this happens, we say the law determines that the ice must be melted; but how the ice and the heat came to be thus together, that the law does not determine in the least. Given any initial phenomenon, where matter and force are in action, and Natural law may be truly said to determine not only its immediate result, but also all the successive phenomena which arise from it; but the initial phenomenon itself it cannot account for. If it be said that this initial

phenomenon is the result of preceding phenomena, and so of law; this is simply pushing the commencement of the chain farther back, and saying that this was not the initial phenomenon, but some other. No doubt it is possible by perpetually repeating this process of pushing back, and thus making the initial point in the chain vague and indefinite, to so weary and confuse the mind, or so occupy it with an enormous number of intermediate links, as to cause it to forget the object of its search, or even imagine that it had attained it. But a moment's thought will convince any one that in so doing we have but hidden the difficulty, not solved it; no, nor even approximated ever so slightly to its solution.

Nor is this a mere metaphysical difficulty, arising from the necessary laws of human thought; it appears also in a purely physical shape, in the doctrine of the degradation of force. For the production of any Natural phenomenon it is required not only that a certain quantity of the suitable force or forces be present, but that they be present in a certain intensity. If from any cause the intensity is lowered, the effect will no longer ensue, however largely the quantity of the forces may be increased. To take a single

rough example by way of illustration. We have a furnace capable of melting cast-iron, and we know that a certain amount of fuel burnt in that furnace will enable us to melt a certain quantity of iron, say 100 lbs. Suppose now that we use this same quantity of fuel in raising a large volume of water to the boiling point; the apparatus being so arranged that none of the heat shall be wasted or carried off in steam, but all shall remain in the water. In this volume of boiling water, then, we have contained that quantity of heat which is sufficient to melt 100 lbs. of iron. Yet it is clear to every one, that to melt the iron by the heat thus contained in the water is impossible. There is enough heat there to do it we know; but the heat is not sufficiently intense, in consequence of its having been first employed to boil the water. Nor can the heat be ever again recovered from the boiling water in its intenser form.

Now just such a change in the capacity of forces to produce effects, as that here wrought in the heat of the furnace by applying it to boil water, is wrought in Natural forces generally, in well nigh every phenomenon that occurs. There is no diminution of the quantity of the forces; this remains constant. But

at the end of the phenomenon, some part at least of the forces engaged will be found to have become lowered in intensity; so that the total force in existence after the phenomenon, is no longer able to accomplish all that was in its power before. Its capacity to produce effects has become limited.

The converse of this, an increase in the intensity of Natural forces, is very exceptional, and is probably always accompanied with a more than proportional degradation; a small quantity of force becoming intensified at the expense of a large quantity degraded. At all events the occasional exceptions are quite unable to affect the general tendency to degradation.

Now from this law of degradation, three important results follow:—(1) It is clear that Nature is not a system that can possibly, as a whole, maintain itself. Its cycles may be perpetually recurring, but the power that moves each new course is not that which worked in the old one, but new power drawn from a higher level, and unable, after once being used, to accomplish the same work over again. (2) The ultimate tendency of Nature is towards a state of passive rest and equilibrium. Whenever two or more forces balance one another, so as to be in equilibrium, such

equilibrium can only be disturbed by the introduction of a new force of greater intensity. Since, then, the whole forces of Nature are ever being lowered in intensity, it follows that their power to disturb equilibrium is steadily diminishing; in other words, that an ever larger and larger proportion of the Natural forces in existence is daily becoming locked up in circumstances, from which there is no Natural agency in the universe capable of liberating them. The end of such a state of things can only be absolute passivity. (3) There has been, and to some extent still is, in Nature a store of force of a degree of intensity far greater than that which ever attaches to force as it issues from Natural phenomena, and which cannot therefore be accounted for as the result of Nature, but must have sprung originally from some other source. One of these storehouses of force is the sun, or rather those phenomena (whatever they are) which make the sun the source of light and heat it is. The enormous quantity of fresh force of high intensity which we are daily receiving from the sun, is what blinds as to the rapidity with which force becomes degraded in our hands, much in the same way as the daily receipt of £1000 from his banker, might naturally blind

a spendthrift to the rapidity with which his fortune was melting away, since he always had plenty to spend, and however much he spent, it made no apparent difference for the morrow. None the less certain, however, would it be that such a state of things could not go on always; the end must be bankruptcy; and the fact that he could go on so long arose only from some one else having, before his days, accumulated a fortune on his behalf. Just as surely does the degradation of force in Nature imply that Nature cannot go on in activity for ever, but must end (left alone) in passive, death-like rest; while that it is active now can only be from some agency outside of and other than Nature, which at the beginning conferred on Nature that power to act which it would never have possessed of itself.

Here, then, are vital points in Nature, which the mind demands to have accounted for; but which Nature by itself, no matter how scientifically regarded, is hopelessly incompetent to give even a clue to. But two alternatives are open. We must either believe this missing cause to be not material, but *mental*, or we must give up the universality of Natural law, and suppose that formerly action was able to arise from rest in a way in which it does not arise,

and, according to law, cannot arise, now. The latter supposition would be destructive of all science; for who could tell how often such infractions of law had taken or would take place? If once, long ago, why not frequently? This, therefore, need not be further noticed. But it may be said: Why conclude that the original cause was mental, rather than any other kind of power? For two reasons—1st, because all matter, force, and law in Nature being excluded, there is simply no kind of power but mental, which we can assume; and, 2nd, because the phenomena of the human mind afford (according to the ordinary view) an exact parallel to the missing cause. It is the characteristic function of the human mind, by its directive influence, to evoke action where otherwise there would be rest[3]. If, then, there is this power of mind known to exist and to have precisely the function which, only to a greater degree, the cause of Nature's action must have, is it not the only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn, that *mind* is the cause we are in search of? Of course, on the

[3] The human mind, therefore, will be one of those exceptional cases of intensifying action alluded to above. It does this, however, most probably at the expense of a much larger quantity of force degraded; and so without any real balance of gain.

materialist's view, what we call mind being nothing but an aggregate of matter and force, this analogy of human agency has no existence. On the necessitarian view it is weakened, since although the phenomena of human action still suggest that mind could have such an initial influence, yet as man's mind never has it, being always led to act by a previous action of Nature upon itself, the analogy is much less perfect and striking. Neither of these views, however, touch in the least the main point of the argument, namely, that the phenomena of Nature inexorably demand for their explanation the existence of some power beyond Nature by which they were, at least *once*, set in action; which power must be of a different order to matter, force, or law. All that the analogy of human influence is wanted for, is to make the identification of this unknown power with an intelligent but superhuman mind, clearer and easier. Whether the analogy be perfect or imperfect makes comparatively little difference.

It is in this way beyond a doubt that the contemplation of Nature has in all ages led man to believe in the existence of God. He may have localized the supernatural power which caused the action of Nature, in Natural objects themselves, and so have believed in many Gods.

Or, perceiving the dependence of phenomena one upon another, he may have selected some one principal source of action, as the sun, and supposed all supernatural power to reside in that. Or he may have formed the grand conception of One Great Spirit independent of all things, yet pervading all, and acting upon all. In either case his faith in the supernatural equally bears witness to the necessity felt by the human mind to believe in something beyond Nature in order to account for Nature's action. Not indeed that men commonly, or perhaps ever, reasoned out the inference in the detailed fashion in which it has been presented above. The step from action to living agent was much too natural and easy, for them to stop and weigh the possibility of some other explanation. Mind, and mind only, was intuitively felt to be the one source to which Natural phenomena must be ultimately ascribed. But what was natural and intuitive in common thought, has been shown to be in a scientific view inexorable and demonstrative. However dimly perceived, the reasoning of men generally has been founded upon a deep principle of necessity, and the essential conclusion come to is only placed upon a firmer basis the more keenly it is weighed and analyzed.

The transition from this belief in God as the cause of Natural phenomena, to the belief in Him as Creator, is simple and almost inevitable. The idea of an eternally existing universe utterly passive, waiting for the Divine impetus which should set it in action, is plainly a much harder and more improbable one than that of a universe called into existence and set in action at one and the same time. Hence, from God as the cause of action arose naturally the notion of God as the cause of existence[4].

[4] The way in which this argument of causation is usually expressed—"Every thing must have a cause, therefore there is a First Cause"—is singularly unfortunate. The retort is obvious. "Then, on this principle, God also must have a cause," and so on *ad infinitum*. The argument in the text is not exposed to this retort:—1st, Because it makes causation the necessary inference from *action*, but not from *existence*. 2nd, Because it limits thein ference to *material* action. The grounds for both these positions lie, of course, in the personal consciousness of the writer as to what are the necessary laws of human thought in regard to causation; which must be verified by the personal consciousness of each reader, there being no universal court to which appeal is possible. To the writer it seems perfectly clear that neither existence nor mental influence are apprehended by the mind as things requiring to be accounted for, in the same way that material action is. They are not felt to be effects, but may be ultimate facts. With regard to mental influence we do indeed think of *motive* as necessarily or commonly preceding action, but then by motive we do not as a rule mean external influence, but internal aim or purpose, which, whether it is so or not, we certainly regard as *possibly* self-evolved by the mind itself.

On the third point in which science fails to account for Nature, it is unnecessary to say much. The argument from *design* is too well known and has been too ably handled in other works (as especially in the Duke of Argyle's "Reign of Law,") to need either stating or enlarging on here. It may suffice to point out what is its special function; what, that is, it adds to the results already obtained. The second point insisted on landed us in the belief that all the action of Nature must be traced ultimately to the influence of superhuman mind, which mind we call God. And the connexion of this with the first point was seen to lead naturally to the belief that God is also the Author of Nature's existence. Our third point tells us that in thus causing Nature to be and to act, God had at least partly in view the welfare and happiness of living creatures, and especially of man; thus at once enlarging our conception of God's character and attributes, and also affording us some slight glimpse into His motives in causing Nature to be what it is.

On these three points we take our stand. The statement that Nature can be sufficiently accounted for without God, that Natural phenomena do not require us to assume His existence,

is proved to be false. For, on the contrary, it appears that except we assume the existence and influence of God we cannot account for Nature at all. It is not, therefore, left to miracles to prove that God is, but this may justly be taken for granted as a means of explaining them. And, be it observed, the main point proved by the above inquiry is precisely the very point which we needed to have proved in order to explain them. For miracles to be credible, we saw that it was necessary to assume the existence of a superhuman mind capable of directing the matter and forces of Nature, so that other combinations should occur, and other phenomena result, than those which matter, force, and law would, if left to themselves, bring about. But we have now seen further, that for Natural phenomena to occur, we are also compelled to assume the existence of exactly such a mind, capable of acting in exactly such a way. Natural phenomena and miracles thus require precisely the same assumption to account for their occurrence; the one difference being that Natural phenomena are traceable to God's directive influence through many intermediate links of preceding phenomena, while miracles are traceable through at most but very few,—a difference

not of kind, but of degree, since in this respect every initial phenomenon of Nature was exactly like a miracle. But for the difference in purpose, indeed, we might justly reckon (as is often done) every such initial phenomenon as a miracle. In respect to external appearance and to internal causation there is absolutely no distinction. The argument before us really, therefore, goes beyond what was proposed to be proved by it. For it shows that not only are miracles, viewed as "mighty works," credible; but that "mighty works," indistinguishable from miracles, *have actually occurred;* and that from these every phenomenon we see around us has had its rise. If, then, the disbeliever in "mighty works" would be consistent, and would deal out the same measure of faith to whatever possesses the same characteristics, he must reject initial phenomena of Nature as much as miracles; or rather, since to do this would be to suppose that the long sequence of subsequent phenomena have been without cause altogether (which to a scientific mind at all events must seem impossible), he must reject all phenomena whatsoever, for each one involves, far back in time, a miracle.

To sum up again in any detail the results of the inquiry into the causation of miracles now

completed, is quite unnecessary. We have seen (1) that there is no necessary discordance between miracles and Nature, but that both may well have proceeded from the same Author acting after the same fashion; (2) that the special intervention to which Scripture ascribes miracles is quite sufficient to account for their divergence from Nature's ordinary course; (3) that the assumption of such an Author, capable of so intervening, is one which Nature itself compels us to make if we would satisfactorily account for even the commonest phenomena. In all these respects there is not the slightest ground for pronouncing miracles incredible. And this conclusion sets at rest also the objections urged against miracles as marvellous phenomena. For the mode of causation of miracles being one (proximately) different from that of the ordinary events we have experience of (the former being directly, the latter only indirectly, connected with special Divine intervention), miracles are at once placed out of the range of common experience, and cannot, therefore, be rejected on account of any divergence or contrariety in regard to it.

Both as phenomena and as effects, as "marvels" and as "mighty works," miracles are to be concluded as certainly credible, if one

point only be granted—namely, that God chose to exert for their occurrence that power over Nature which He exerted in the initiation of Natural phenomena generally. The discussion of this final question we now proceed to.

CHAPTER IV.

MIRACLES REGARDED AS SIGNS.

When considering the different names given to miracles in Scripture, we saw (pp. 36—38) that the most frequent and characteristic one was "sign." And the reason for this appeared to be that by this name miracles were denoted when viewed in connexion with their *purpose*, which is plainly the most essential and weighty point in regard to them. The value of miracles lay in their fitness to accomplish certain ends. Their relation to those ends therefore, far more than their manner of causation, or phenomenal character, constitutes their proper essence, to which all else is subordinate. The course of the preceding argument has shown further that upon this question of purpose the whole credibility of miracles depends. They are credible as phenomena, they are credible as effects, if it is credible that God chose to work them; which of course depends entirely upon the purpose which such intervention

would serve. Thus on either view, that of Scripture, or that of critical inquiry, the discussion of the purpose and significance of miracles is of pre-eminent importance.

In the first place, it is advisable to fix clearly what kind of purpose it is which Scripture ascribes to miracles. This is implied, in part, in the word "sign." A sign necessarily points to something beyond itself, for the sake of which it is given. There may, of course, be an intrinsic value in the sign as well, but its chief value *as sign* must always lie in the thing signified. Miracles then, being signs, have their chief value in something beyond themselves to which they point. When we inquire why any miracle or set of miracles was wrought, we are not to look so much to the miracles themselves for the answer, as to something outside of them which they signified. This is extremely important to bear in mind. A very large number of Scripture miracles have an intrinsic value of their own, and in dwelling on this we are very apt to overlook the element of significance. When, for instance, we read of the plagues of Egypt, we are apt to regard them merely as so many judgments wrought to punish the obstinacy of Pharaoh, and to effect the deliverance of Israel, because this was

their intrinsic character and value. But Scripture speaks of them also in another light, viz., as signs of the relation in which God who wrought them stood towards Egypt on the one hand, and Israel on the other; and makes *this*, rather than their intrinsic character and material effects, the prominent point in regard to them. So, again, in considering the miracles of healing in the Gospels, we are apt to view them simply as acts of mercy done for the benefit of the sufferers. But beside this, Scripture speaks of them as testimonies to the person and mission of Him who wrought them, and makes *this* rather than their intrinsic value the point to be insisted on. In estimating the credibility of miracles we of course look to both these points, their intrinsic value and their ulterior signification, since both involve an element of purpose; but we look far more to the latter than the former, and this for three reasons: (1) Because it is on the significance of miracles that Scripture ever lays the greatest stress. (2) Because while intrinsic value attaches only to some miracles, and to these in very various degrees, significance belongs to all, and to all equally. (3) Because while the natural effects of miracles were mostly transitory and local, their significance is far-reaching and eternal.

The value of a record of miracles to us lies almost wholly in their significance.

If now, it be asked further, what it is which miracles signify, there can be no doubt as to the answer. They point invariably to some truth about God and His relation towards men. The revealing or enforcing of such truths is the true purpose of miracles. Whatever else they did was subordinate, and one might almost say accidental. To inquire whether miracles regarded as signs are credible, is hence the same thing as to ask, (1) whether it is credible that God should purpose to reveal or enforce truths concerning Himself; and (2) whether, if so, miracles are means so adapted to this purpose as to make their employment for that end credible.

The discussion of the first of these questions involves a great and well-nigh insuperable difficulty,—the lack of any sufficient standard by which to judge of it. When dealing with the phenomenal character of miracles the standard of appeal was ordinary human experience; when dealing with their causation the standard was Nature: in both cases things well known and easily examined. But in this new question, as to the credibility of God purposing to reveal certain truths, the standard is one

almost wholly out of our reach. For the real test of this credibility must be an appeal to God's character and general designs in regard to man. But, putting aside the information given by miracles, what do we know of God's character and designs? Extremely little, and that little very dimly. To expect, therefore, precise conclusions here, like those arrived at in some of the earlier portions of our inquiry, is out of the question. The most we can hope to attain to is an approximate result,—that such revelation would not be, so far as we can see, an unreasonable thing; or something of that sort. Some there are, indeed, who would substitute imagination for knowledge, and argue unhesitatingly from their conceptions of God to the credibility of such and such things being His acts. Others would boldly presume that where we know nothing there is nothing to be known, and hence that whatever we cannot assert with confidence that God would have done, that we may conclude He did not do. But inasmuch as no conclusions based upon such modes of arguing can possibly be of the slightest value, we pass them by, to get what meagre hints we can out of the modicum of real knowledge which is at our disposal.

It has been already pointed out (p. 146, note), that our knowledge of God independently of revelation is of two kinds, Natural and Moral. The only respect in which the former of these bears upon the point under discussion is in the item of *design* as exhibited in Nature, in so far as that design has to do with the welfare of man. If it be true that the arrangements of Nature exhibit a special benevolent interest on the part of Nature's Ruler in regard to man, then it may certainly be inferred that if there were any thing else beneficial to man, it would not be (so far) out of harmony with that Ruler's character to confer it. A similar inference might, of course, be drawn with equal justice in regard to all living beings. And in neither case is the argument sufficient to establish any definite presumption in favour of special intervention. The most that it can do is this: that if special intervention is alleged, and its credibility turns upon the disposition of Nature's Ruler towards living beings, then the evidence of design shows that such favourable intervention would not be discordant with His disposition so far as design reveals it.

The evidence afforded by our Moral knowledge of God is of a different order, and goes perhaps somewhat beyond this. However the

notions have been come by, whether by spontaneous generation within the mind, or through experience of the moral order of the world, there can be no doubt that men as a rule have always had, apart from revelation, certain moral notions, which have led up to a conception more or less vague of a Moral Ruler. The most important of these notions are those of right and wrong, of responsibility, and of sin; the last of these being derived from the other two. Man feels that there is somewhere a rule of right and wrong, which is beyond his control or the control of any man, and which he sees reflected within in the judgments of his conscience, and without in the moral government of the world. He feels further that this rule carries with it a sense of obligation on his part, that he should conform his actions to it; as if the rule were imposed upon him by some superior power to whom he was accountable. Hence, if he does not obey the rule, as he very soon perceives that he does not, he is filled with a mingled feeling of dissatisfaction, uneasiness, and fear, which we call the sense of sin. The interpretation which man has invariably put upon these moral notions is, that there is a God, either one or many, whose will in regard to man is the rule of right and wrong, to whom

man is accountable, and who will reward or punish according to man's deserts. That these facts are so, is borne witness to by the universal prevalence of religious notions and religious services every where. It is easy to call such things superstition and priestcraft; but if they are such, they are none the less phenomena which need to be accounted for. Whence came superstition? What gave priestcraft its power? Strike out the notion of God as having no place in man's necessary conceptions, and how shall the origin or dominance of this superstition be explained? Deny the universal sense of sin, and where is the fulcrum which gave priestcraft its tremendous power? It is, of course, open to any one to deny that these moral notions have any foundation in fact. They may be characterized as delusions of the imagination; though how in this case their prevalence, or indeed origin, is to be accounted for, it is hard to see. But however this may be, it is at least plain that they are facts in human nature, and facts which, along with the facts of Nature before alluded to (pp. 158, 159), have led mankind throughout all time to some notion or other of God. Preferring, then, to suppose, as intrinsically most reasonable, that these moral notions have a real

foundation, and are not baseless fancies, we have to inquire how they bear upon the credibility of revelation.

There is a Divine rule for man's conduct; this rule he is bound to obey; and upon his obedience depends to a certain extent his weal or woe. Clearly then it is of importance to man, 1st, to know exactly what that rule is; 2nd, to know what the issue of his obedience or disobedience is; and 3rd, to know whether if he have disobeyed, there is any means of avoiding (1) the evil consequences of this disobedience, and (2) the recurrence of the like disobedience for the future. In a word, man should know as much as possible of the moral relations subsisting between God and himself. Now part of this knowledge he has already in these moral notions just reviewed, but not enough to satisfy him either in respect to clearness or extent. The desire to know more, and more clearly, is manifested in the eagerness with which men in all ages have been ready to listen to and believe any one who came to them professing to give them more knowledge on these points; provided, of course, the new information offered them did not offend against their prejudice too deeply. That a fuller knowledge of God's moral relations to men is a felt

want of human nature, may be taken for granted then. Now to argue from this want to its supply, and say that because man thinks he needs such knowledge, therefore God must have given it, would be most unwarrantable. Our ignorance of the plan of the universe, of man's place in it, and of God's feeling towards him (revelation being put on one side), is too profound to allow of any such inference being justly drawn. But while we dare not infer the supply from the want, still less venture to determine on *à priori* grounds (as some do) the time, manner, and extent of this desiderated revelation; this much we certainly are warranted in inferring,—that such a revelation, conducing, as it seems to us it would, very largely to man's highest interest, would not be incredible. Nay, rather, that so far as our knowledge enables us to judge, the weight of probability is decidedly on the other side. It would seem to us more credible that such a revelation should be made than the contrary. The extreme scantiness of our knowledge forbids indeed absolutely the inference that it *was* made, but none the less does the balance of credibility lie distinctly on that side rather than the other.

Lastly, apart from these special views of

God, the mere fact that He is man's Maker and Ruler, and that man is able to discern Him, be it ever so dimly, as such, is enough to make a subsequent revelation not incredible. God has made man, and bestowed upon him intelligence; that intelligence leads him to some scanty knowledge of God, enough to stimulate his desire for more, but not nearly enough to satisfy. Now this result of his intelligence must surely have been known to God, if indeed it was not expressly designed and intended. Can it then be deemed incredible that God should intervene to satisfy this intelligent craving of His own creating? Nay, is it not rather, so far as our means of judging of the matter go, more credible that He should, than that He should not? Again, the basis we have for reasoning is far too narrow and precarious to allow of our inferring any thing certainly; but what basis we have lends support distinctly to the credibility of a revelation being vouchsafed, rather than the contrary.

These three points, the existence of beneficent design in Nature as implying God's goodwill towards man; the need of fuller acquaintance with God's relations to man, on account of man's sense of responsibility and sin; and the inevitable desire for more knowledge of

his Maker, arising from his being created intelligent;—these are, it is believed, the chief available standards to which appeal can be made to determine the antecedent probability of special revelation; to determine, that is, whether it is credible that God should purpose to reveal to man truths concerning Himself. From each quarter a similar answer is obtained, varying only in force and clearness;—there is no reason why this should be deemed incredible; but there is some slight reason why it should be deemed more credible than not.

The arguments commonly urged on the other side, such as the difficulty or impossibility of the Infinite holding communication with the finite, &c., &c., will be found all to resolve themselves into one or other of the two cases alluded to at starting (p. 170), viz., where the standard appealed to is either our imaginary conception of what God is, or our ignorance taken as if equivalent to knowledge. A detailed discussion of them is hence unnecessary.

We turn, then, to the second question involved in our inquiry;—whether, it being credible that God should purpose to reveal to man truths concerning Himself, miracles are means so adapted to this purpose as to make their employment credible? The extreme

meagreness of the materials available for determining the former question, must make us all the more careful in considering this, where the matter lies more within our reach.

It is clear that all special revelation is a departure from the normal order of the universe. It is not part of the law of mind that God should make known to it new truths. Rather, it is contrary to mental uniformity that this should happen; as much so, as it is contrary to Natural uniformity that physical miracles should happen. Accordingly we call revelation a mental miracle. But if all revelation is thus in its very essence miraculous, the whole question might seem to be settled without further discussion. Miracles are not only means *adapted* to reveal truths, but they are positively the only means available[1]. Revelation is itself a miracle, and so without miracles

[1] This may seem to some like limiting God's power. But it is not so. It is not said that God could not have caused certain truths to be known without miracles. No doubt He could, by placing their knowledge within man's power in the ordinary course of Nature. But He has not done so; they are not thus knowable. Hence to make them known requires a departure from the ordinary course of Nature, that is, a miracle; and this, not because God could not have ordered it otherwise, but because God thus willed that it should be. If miracles, therefore, are the only possible means of revelation it is only because such was God's will.

there can be no revelation. If then revelation be credible, miracles also must be credible. If there is no objection, but rather the contrary, to believing that God purposed the former; there can be no objection, but rather the contrary, to believing that He purposed the latter.

Here, however, we are met by a flat denial that God ever could choose to work a miracle. It is inconsistent, it is said, with His character and perfections. Of course this is tantamount to a denial that God would ever vouchsafe a revelation; and might therefore seem to belong more properly to the preceding head. Since, however, the form in which the objection meets us is not a denial of God's willingness to make certain truths known, but a denial of His willingness to use certain means (which however necessarily involves the other), it is somewhat more convenient to consider it at this stage of our inquiry than earlier.

The objection may thus be expressed:—The only means we have of judging of God's character and manner of working are the manifestations of these observable in Nature. Now the universal and essential characteristic of Nature is that it is uniform, and that this uniformity is absolute and rigid. There are many cases continually occurring in which it

may seem to us that it would be most beneficial if this uniformity were just for a moment suspended or modified. We have wants that need to be satisfied, desires that crave earnestly for their object, and both wants and desires seem to us legitimate and important, quite as much so as any of those alleged in regard to revelation. But in the way of these desires stands Nature's uniformity. What we desiderate can be ours only by a deviation from the normal order of Nature. Now in every such case, experience teaches us that Nature does not vary one iota on our behalf. Instead of its uniformity bending to us, it is ever we, our wants and desires, that have to bend to it, nay, perhaps be utterly crushed by it. But no matter; Nature swerves not. And we believe that this is so because Nature comes from God, and adequately reflects God's character. God is all-knowing, all-wise; and He alone is so. God, then, in fashioning Nature has foreseen and provided for every contingency that may occur, and no one else is competent to judge the wisdom or necessity of what He has ordered. Whatever it may seem to us, Nature *as it is* is the right thing, the best thing. And God never changes; from eternity to eternity His will remains one and the same, unaltered

and unalterable. Nature, therefore, as it is, will and must go on, working itself out according to the plan originally designed for it by its Author. To suppose a miracle to occur, supposes one of two things,—either that the plan originally designed was found in working to be insufficient, and had to be modified accordingly; or that God had changed His purpose, and therefore deviated from His former plan. The first of these suppositions makes God not all-knowing, the second makes Him not immutable. But Nature teaches us that God is both these; and Nature as reflecting God's character is well known, and its testimony certain. With this Divine character, so reflected and borne witness to, miracles conflict. Miracles, then, are incredible because they require us to suppose God to be other than Nature represents Him to be. We cannot believe that He whose character we read in Nature as all-wise and unchanging could ever degrade and stultify Himself by choosing to work a miracle.

This is, in brief, the objection which we have now to consider, and is the same with that reserved for the present chapter at the close of the last (p. 165). It is to some extent an old acquaintance arrayed in a new dress, to some extent it is really new. The uniformity of

Nature, on which this objection mainly turns, has come before us already in two forms, as a matter of phenomenal experience, and as the result of Natural law. We now trace it up to its original,—the unchanging and omniscient will of God. In so far, therefore, the objection is old. But this new aspect brings with it new difficulties altogether absent from the former ones; and in so far it demands a new and independent treatment.

One important truth which the objection lays stress on is, that our conceptions of what would be desirable are no criteria of what God will actually do. We are apt to think that an alteration in Nature's uniformity would be advantageous in many cases. Such alteration, however, does not take place, because God's mind in regard to them is not as our mind. This precisely confirms what was said above about the unwarrantableness of inferring revelation from our need or desire for it. Then we argued from *à priori* considerations; here experience comes in and supports the same opinion. The most that any such wants or desires on our part entitle us to do, is to regard any act fulfilling them as somewhat more credible than it would otherwise have been: an effect which inevitably follows from the

existence of the want. The only point here to which it is necessary to demur, is the tacit assumption that, because in our experience no deviation from the uniform course of Nature ever has taken place for the satisfaction of our wants, therefore no such deviation ever can take place. The true inference is, manifestly, that we have no right to *expect it;* which is a very different thing from the impossibility of its occurrence. But the whole of this question of experience has been so fully argued above in Chap. II., that there is no need to go into it again here.

The other great pair of truths which the objection bases itself on, are the omniscient wisdom and immutability of God as reflected in the uniformity of Nature. There is no truth of Natural theology, after that of God's existence, that surpasses these in importance. Nor can we conceive any more striking and beautiful imaging of these truths than that afforded by Nature, especially as discerned by the scientific eye. The fallacy of the objection lies in the assumption that any other mode of action, than this of undeviating uniformity, would be inconsistent with the attributes of omniscience and immutability. That this assumption is altogether unfounded may

be easily shown. Suppose that God foresaw that at certain points in the world's history crises would arise which might be most wisely dealt with (in order to carry out His ends) in a special way, and therefore determined that when they arose He would deviate from His normal manner of working;—would this involve any inconsistency with His omniscience or immutability? Surely not the very least. His unusual action would be as much foreseen, as much predetermined, as much a part of the one unalterable plan, as His usual. True, it would not carry the impress of these attributes on its face; it would not reflect them (as we say), in the same way that the latter does; but it would not be at all inconsistent with them. If, then, such deviations from Nature come before us, all we can say is that from these exceptional occurrences we could not have inferred that God was omniscient and immutable. But neither could we have inferred that He was not. We should simply have known nothing at all about these attributes, one way or the other.

But it will be said: Had God foreseen the occurrence of such crises He would have provided for them by means of Nature's uniformity. So perhaps we think; but what then? Is our

conception of what God was likely to do, to be made the criterion of what He did do, so that we should say "He must have done this," or "He could not have done that?" It is a part of this very objection that such inferences from our ideas of what is fit, to what God will do, are altogether unwarrantable. On this ground only, then, we might dismiss the rejoinder as utterly futile. But further, there is good reason for rejecting it also on its own merits. Certainly, if we look only to the intrinsic character and value of miracles it would seem as if they might well have been superseded by some original modification of the course of Nature. For example: that instead of men being healed miraculously, it should have been so ordered that they should not have needed healing. But we saw that this intrinsic value of miracles was but a part, and that a very small and unimportant part, of the ends they were designed to serve. Their main purpose was to point to some truth concerning God outside themselves. But this is precisely what the ordinary phenomena of Nature would not have accomplished. Had they, therefore, been superseded by such, their proper significance would have been wholly lost. On every ground, therefore, this alleged non-accordance of miracles with God's fore-

sight must be set aside as invalid. They may quite as well have been parts of a clearly foreseen and predetermined plan. And, be it observed, it is thus that Scripture requires us to regard them. We are not asked to believe in miracles which were after-thoughts, but in such as were foreknown and decided on before Nature's uniformity so much as began to be. This appears, partly by the direct statements of the sacred writers, who speak, for example, frequently of the cardinal events of Christ's life as having been fore-ordained before the foundation of the world; partly by one particular kind of miracles, *prophecies*, one of the functions of which was to declare beforehand how God would hereafter intervene to carry out His purposes. The events thus described as foreknown, or predicted as about to happen, were many of them actual miracles, while others were events so intimately bound up with miracles that the foreknowledge of the one implies the foreknowledge of the other. If, for example, Christ's death and exaltation were parts of the original Divine plan (as it is repeatedly asserted they were), then apart from all special references to His Resurrection, we at once infer that this also was part, since the contingencies which led to it were all of

them among the things foreseen. Now whether this Scriptural view of miracles be accepted or not, or whatever difficulties there may be involved in it (difficulties which would require far too long a digression to be discussed here), this much is clear,—that the assumption that miracles were after-thoughts, being one (1) unnecessary in itself, (2) inconsistent with the proper significance of miracles, and (3) strongly repudiated by Scripture, is one that can be allowed no weight whatever as an objection to their credibility. However strongly Nature's uniformity may witness to God's foresight and immutability, Scripture witnesses to it no less clearly, and that as much in regard to miracles as in regard to any other events.

But at least, it will be replied, a deviation from Nature's uniformity must appear less worthy of God than its strict observance; for it is admitted that two of His greatest attributes, which Nature exhibits in the clearest light, are not thus manifestly displayed in miracles. These, therefore, cannot but seem less Divine, less noble, and surely must be in so far less probable. No doubt this is to some extent true, so long as these two attributes of omniscience and immutability are the only ones regarded; though even here mira-

cles of prophecy may be claimed as an important exception, where foresight and unchanging will are even more strikingly displayed than in Nature. But these are not the only aspects of God's character and relations to man which miracles are designed to reveal. What if, to make known other truths, God stooped from the elevation of eternal uniformity, and deigned to manifest Himself after a more human manner, acting more as man would act;—is this incredible, when the design of the whole was man's instruction and welfare? Is it incredible that one addressing foreigners should speak in their language rather than his own? And so, when God would make Himself known to men, is it incredible that He should adopt that method which would most easily be understood by them? (For that mankind has ever regarded miracles as more apparent and certain manifestations of God's action than ordinary Nature, will scarcely be disputed.) Nay, rather, is not this very condescension to man's weakness, itself one of the most glorious Divine attributes which miracles display? Taken, therefore, in connexion with their proper ends it cannot be said that miracles are in any respect less worthy of God, or less consistent with His greatness, than that

reign of unbending law which marks external Nature.

The general conclusion thus arrived at, of the at all events possible harmony of miracles with what we know from other sources of God's character, destroys the last stronghold of sweeping unbelieving objection. We saw at the close of the last chapter that there was no tenable ground for objection on account of their relation to our experience as phenomena, or on account of their relation to God as unusual effects of His directive will, *if* it was credible that His will should have been exerted to produce them. This question we have now discussed; and we have seen that so far as we know what God's character and will is, there is nothing either in the end to be attained by miracles, or in miracles themselves as means to that end, which is in the least inconsistent or incongruous. We have not indeed any sufficient ground for presuming that miracles would actually be used; our basis of reasoning is far too weak and narrow for that. But we have even less ground for saying that they are improbable. The matter is an entirely open one, to be decided by the special reasons for believing or disbelieving in each particular case.

Here, then, it might seem as if our inquiry closed, the discussion of such special reasons being beside the purpose of the present work. And if all that had been proposed were to decide upon the credibility of miracles in general, *i. e.* whether any miracles could under any circumstances be believed, this would be the case. But the subject in hand is not miracles in general, but distinctively Scripture miracles. Accordingly, both under the head of "marvels," and still more of "mighty works," we have considered not only whether miracles in the abstract were credible, but whether those recorded in Scripture were so. In like manner here it seems necessary to turn to these special cases, and inquire whether some "signs" being credible, these particular ones are so. It may be that in them there is an incongruity with God's character and will which should lead us to reject them. In which case it would avail little to have proved that such incongruity was not of the essence of a miracle. Just, therefore, as in the case of the violation of law it was necessary to examine the miracles of Scripture in some detail, in order to see whether the principle laid down applied to them; so here, having decided that miracles need not, as miracles, be inconsistent with God's cha-

racter and will, it is necessary to ascertain whether Scripture miracles come under this category.

We have said that some miracles are inevitable to revelation, every act of revelation being itself a miracle. But not all Scripture miracles are of this kind. Many are rather accompaniments of revelation; signs pointing to it, rather than direct embodiments or vehicles of truths. Others have a double character, being partly the one and partly the other. Now it may be objected that these latter kinds, which are not mere acts of revelation, were unnecessary and therefore incongruous. In employing miracles God would surely employ no more than would suffice for His purpose; and His purpose being the revelation of certain truths, acts of revealing would be all that was really required. In other words, the objection would assert that mental miracles are the only credible ones; but that all physical ones must be rejected. Now, as to the question of such and such miracles being necessary,—this is a point which we have no means whatever of determining. The most we can do in any case is to ascertain whether the occurrence of any miracle, as contrasted with its non-occurrence, was distinctly advantageous; *i. e.* whether it tended to pro-

mote the general purpose in connexion with which it was wrought. If it did, then it was clearly, in regard to that purpose, credible. Wherever, then, it appears that a particular miracle or set of miracles was advantageous to revelation, so that we may be sure that revelation would not have fared so well without it as with it, there it was clearly congruous, and as a consequence credible, though we are in no position to assert that it was necessary.

Were the physical miracles of Scripture, then, such as distinctly tended to promote the cause of revelation, so that revelation was more effective with them than it would have been without them? They were so in two ways:—

1. They served as heralds and credentials to those to whom revelations were made, and whose office it was to communicate these revelations to others. It was in connexion with such persons, or very often through their visible instrumentality, that well-nigh every miracle recorded in Scripture was wrought. One special benefit of the miracles was, hence, to call attention to these messengers of God, and lead men to give heed to their words; as was the case with very many of the miracles recorded in the Acts as wrought by Paul when on his missionary journeys. Or still oftener their

function was to establish the connexion of the messenger with the Sender, so that his message should be received as not his own but God's. The former purpose of miracles is aptly illustrated by John iv. 45. "The Galileans received Him, because they had seen all things (*i. e.* all the *signs*, see ii. 22), which He did in Jerusalem." The latter no less aptly by John iii. 2, the words of Nicodemus, "Rabbi, we know that Thou hast come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs which Thou doest, except God be with him." Now these advantages would not have existed had physical miracles been absent. Those who received revelations might no doubt have conveyed them to others just as easily without the accompaniment of visible miracles as with it. But how difficult would it have been in many cases for them to obtain a hearing; how still more difficult to convince those who would hear, that the message delivered was any thing more than the individual opinion of the speaker. Whereas the working of signs proved that there was some power associated with him, which claimed a higher reverence. To argue from this that such accompanying physical miracles were necessary for the accrediting of God's messengers, would be most

unwarrantable. We have no means of judging *à priori* what God's plans in regard to revelation were, and whether therefore the assistance which such signs would afford was likely to be given or withheld. All that is asserted is that such signs harmonize with a scheme of revelation and tend to promote it: and, therefore, if revelation be credible these also are credible.

2. The other great function of physical miracles was to embody in a visible and impressive form some part of the teaching which they accompanied. They were, in fact, what have been well called "acted parables;" only with this great advantage over spoken parables, that they not only vividly illustrated the matter in hand, but also gave a notable pledge of its reality. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick," was an apt proverbial parable illustrating Christ's principle in dealing with sinners,—receiving gladly those who were despised and outcast, just because they most needed help. His cleansing the outcast lepers, whom every one else avoided, was no less an illustration of this, with the added point that it showed His power to give the help that was needed. The physician of the body was in each case the "sign" of the physician of the soul; but when that sign

was exhibited in a miracle it afforded at the same time a pledge of His efficiency. So, again, when Paul would make clear certain truths about our resurrection, he uses the parabolic illustration of seed buried in the ground and springing up again with a new body. But when he would insist on the *reality* of our resurrection, he turns at once to a miracle,—"Christ died and rose again." It needs no argument to show that this function of miracles was distinctly advantageous to the cause of revelation, fulfilling an office which nothing else, so far as we can see, could have fulfilled so well. Again, therefore, while entirely disclaiming any desire to assert such miracles to be necessary accompaniments of revelation, we conclude that they are harmonious and congruous accompaniments, and as such credible.

Under one or other of these two heads all physical miracles in Scripture may be classed. They are either "signs" pointing to and accrediting God's messenger, or they are "signs" pointing to and enforcing His message. In very many cases they are both of these at once. The worth of these considerations as to the congruity of miracles to a scheme of revelation, may be best tested by applying them in detail to some of the objections which have been

brought against Scripture miracles on this score.

It has been objected to several miracles in Scripture that they are trivial in their character, and the occasions on which they were wrought; and are thus unworthy of being accompaniments of revelation. This objection is especially urged against the cycle of miracles connected with Elisha, as his making the iron axe-head swim, his healing the waters of Jericho, multiplying the widow's oil to pay her debt, healing the poisonous mess of pottage, &c. It is also urged against some of the miracles of Christ, as especially His turning the water into wine at the marriage-feast, with a few others. Now, in all these instances, the triviality of the miracles depends upon their being viewed exclusively in their intrinsic character, leaving out of account altogether their significance. Elisha's miracles were not mere acts of helpful kindness to those among whom he dwelt. They were, besides, so many marks of the reality of his prophetic mission, and marks precisely of that character which would most come home to those who were to receive his teaching. They were miracles wrought amongst those "sons of the prophets" who were to be the salt of the nation's religious life. How

necessary was it that their instructor and chief should be felt by them to be one who had his commission from on high; how advisable that the signs of this commission should not only be manifest and undeniable, but of such a character as would make them feel that God was cognizant of and interested in their simple life and daily cares, and that so their religion also was to be a matter of every-day life—of the field, the house, the table,—as well as of formal worship and outward observances. Thus regarded, in connexion with the circumstances under which they were wrought, and the significance which they must hence have had, these miracles of Elisha are seen to be perfectly congruous and quite worthy of the revelation they accompanied. Much that has been said on these signs applies equally to such New Testament miracles as the turning water into wine. Regard this as having no end but the supply of wine for a festal gathering, and it may seem trivial. But regard it as significant of the unascetic, joy-giving character of Christ's mission, and its near relation to common life and men's every-day affairs, and all triviality is at an end. Add on to this the profound teaching embodied in the miracle itself,—the transformation of the common and mean into

the precious and noble, the substitution of inward life-giving for outward cleansing, of the Christian banquet for Jewish purification,—and it becomes one of the most glorious recorded in the whole Gospel history.

Some miracles, again, are objected to on account of their alleged grotesqueness. We may take as the principal instances commonly adduced, the speaking of Balaam's ass, and the preservation of Jonah in the fish. To both of these the same explanation must be given,—examine carefully the circumstances of the case, and the end which the miracle served; and its congruity and fitness will appear so manifestly, that all idea of grotesqueness will drop out of sight.

It is clear that the main purpose of the former miracle must have been some truth which it was to teach the prophet himself. The circumstances of its occurrence place the idea of accrediting, or of general significance to others, out of the question. What truth, then, was it calculated to teach? To arrive at this we must look somewhat farther back than the miraculous occurrence itself. The ass spoke because unjustly smitten; but how came it to be unjustly smitten? Because Balaam had failed to see what the ass did see

—the angel of God standing in the way, and opposing their progress. But why did Balaam fail to see this? No doubt because his thoughts were intent upon the errand he was bound for, the gain and honour he hoped to obtain; gain and honour to be obtained by the misuse of his special prophetic organ—speech on God's behalf. Here, then, lies the contrast:—Balaam intent on gain to be gotten by misused speech, sees not the angel opposing, and would go on in spite of him. The ass, with clearer eye, sees the angel, and refuses. Balaam smites the ass, and God, through the ass's mouth, rebukes him. Surely there is a deep congruity in this miracle. The lesson which Balaam needed to be taught was that speech, being God's gift, must be used only in subjection to God's will, and not as he was disposed to use it. This lesson was taught by God suddenly conferring powers of speech on the ass who *did* subject himself to God, for the rebuke of Balaam who did not. Could any thing more forcibly impress the prophet with the utter madness of the course he was entering upon? If he refused to convey God's messages, was God bound down to him only as a messenger? Might He not choose others, ay, even brute beasts, as worthier organs whereby to speak?

Might not, again, the same power which gave the power of speech to a submissive ass, remove it altogether from the rebellious prophet? The intense reiteration, in the subsequent prophecies, of the thought, "I cannot go beyond the word that God putteth in my mouth" (Num. xxii. 38, xxiii. 8, 12, 20, 26, xxiv. 13), shows how deeply the lesson entered into the prophet's heart. No doubt the same truth might have been revealed to him in other ways, so that we cannot say that the miracle of the ass's speaking was necessary: but it was certainly congruous, and in its original setting not in the least grotesque.

The second instance to be considered shows very strikingly the way in which the significance of miracles removes apparent difficulties in the way of their credibility. Taken intrinsically no incident could well seem more incongruous than the deliverance of Jonah by the agency of the great fish. Why, if the miracle were simply to secure his safe return, should not some piece of drift wood have floated by, to which he might have clung, and which might equally, and without miracle, have brought him safe to land? The answer to this lies wholly in the significance of the miracle. The fish swallowing Jonah was not pro-

perly the means of his deliverance; rather it made his deliverance more utterly hopeless than before. That he should be cast out into the sea, in the midst of a storm, was all but certain death; but that being cast out, he should immediately be swallowed by a shark (for this is probably the fish intended[2]) would make his destruction inevitable. It is probable that he actually did die, and that the miracle lay chiefly in his resuscitation (see p. 122). Why then was it wrought? Jonah's mission was to Nineveh, to declare to that city God's impending wrath. The purpose of the miracle lay in its connexion with that mission. Taking all the notices of Scripture into account, we cannot doubt that the strange story of the prophet's wonderful deliverance was either part of his preaching, or was known already to his listeners. In the first place, then, such a miracle connected with the prophet could not but draw attention to his message, and accredit its authority. But, further, the miracle embodied in itself the main truth which his message was to convey, and testified in the most striking manner to its reality. Jonah had disobeyed God, and cast off His service; and for

[2] See Pusey's Minor Prophets; Introduction to Jonah, pp. 257, 258.

this offence wrath had come down upon him suddenly and to the uttermost, with not a chance of escape any where. The people of Nineveh had disobeyed and cast off God far more grievously than the prophet, and for this they too were threatened with utter destruction;—what hope was there of escape? The God who threatened was One who had shown Himself prompt and fearful in His judgments. They might well tremble at such a message. Yet surely there was also a gleam of hope. Jonah swallowed down by the fish, had yet on repentance come forth alive, alive from the very jaws of the grave. Might not, then, repentance on their part lead in like manner to God's forgiveness and their deliverance? This was Jonah's message,—judgment, swift and utter, for their sins; yet mingled with this, as implied by the very fact of warning being sent beforehand, a hope of mercy if they repented. This, too, was what Jonah's own history pointed to, whereby it was a "sign" to the men of Nineveh; and in pointing testified powerfully to the reality of the things pointed to. Taken, then, in its true connexion and significance the miracle is seen to be full of meaning, and most congruous to the circumstances under which it was wrought. We cannot call such a "sign" grotesque.

Objection has been taken to some miracles on account of their supposed vindictiveness, *i.e.* as exhibiting mere personal wrath, rather than any thing connected with revelation. Elijah's calling down fire upon the companies of fifty sent to take him, and Christ's cursing the fruitless fig-tree, may be taken as examples. In regard to most of these the answer is very plain: they were significant of God's wrath against sinners, and especially against those who opposed His revelation, and sought to hinder or hurt His servants; the congruity of which significance to Scripture revelation generally is too self-evident to need insisting on. One instance seems, however, to require a somewhat more detailed notice, that, namely, of Christ's cursing the fig-tree. The significance of this does not lie so manifestly on the surface, and hence the apparent ground for objection. Yet is its significance not far to seek; it is simply an "acted parable." The comparison of nations and individuals to trees runs throughout the whole of Scripture, and nearly always with reference to their bearing fruit. That a barren tree was doomed to destruction was a common parabolic proverb. Christ had Himself used the image of a fig-tree in this sense not long before (Luke

xiii. 6—9). Thus far, therefore, all is clear. The whole difficulty lies in the fact that this fig-tree was cursed for barrenness at a time when figs were not reasonably to be expected. But then as little were *leaves* to be expected; for with the fig-tree leaves accompany or follow the fruit, so that when the time of leaves is, then also is the time of figs. Now this tree *had* leaves, and perceiving these Christ came to it to see if "under these circumstances" (not "haply" as in the A.V.), He should find figs. The tree, as it were, professed to be fruitful by having leaves; yet in fact it was barren; and, because it was thus, so to speak, inconsistent and hypocritical, therefore it was cursed. And just here lay the point of the parable. The city of Jerusalem and nation of the Jews were not only barren trees in God's sight, but had now aggravated their sin by a hypocritical profession of fruitfulness. Had they not but yesterday made a great show by the welcome they gave to Christ at His entry? Yet when He drew nearer and looked for the fruit which such show ought to have betokened, He found nothing. All the more surely and speedily, then, should the withering wrath of God come down upon them, as now upon their type the leafy figless

tree. Thus regarded, the miracle is seen to be no petty act of personal disappointment and spite, but a clear and most impressive parable, exactly appropriate to the occasion on which it was wrought, and most congruous to the whole scheme of revelation.

The various instances of alleged incongruity above discussed may be taken as sufficient samples of the objections urged against Scripture miracles on this head, and how much such objections are worth. We have seen that though here and there the significance of a miracle is not obvious at first sight, yet that it requires only a more thorough observation of the whole circumstances of the case, and the whole testimony of Scriptnre in regard to it, and forthwith the significance appears clear as daylight, and all question of incongruity is at an end. This fact, that every miracle in Scripture can be shown to be significant and congruous in so simple a manner, by the application of two such natural principles as those of accrediting and illustration, will seem to many a valuable independent evidence of their truth. And when to this we add the long range of time and variety of circumstances, under which these miracles are said to have been wrought, the number and diversity of writers

who have recorded them; and yet that throughout all the utmost harmony prevails; that just where in the history accrediting or illustration seemed most wanted, there miracles are seen most to abound, and invariably just of that kind which appear most precisely suited to the necessities of the occasion;—when we add all this, the evidence will seem to many stronger still. Doubtless there is much to be said on this head which the disbeliever in miracles would find it hard to give a satisfactory explanation of. To accumulate evidence for miracles, however, is not our object, but to examine the worth of the objections raised against them. This aspect of the subject, therefore, we pass over.

But have we reached the end of sceptical objection? We have tracked it back from the first crude off-hand difficulty of experience, through the keen exactitude of scientific criticism, to the speculative doubts of theologians, and the petty cavils of rationalists; and nowhere throughout the whole inquiry have we detected any solid ground on which the assertion of incredibility could be based. Is, then, the whole ground of objection closed? On the contrary, it is not too much to say that only now are we really getting to the root of the

matter, and reaching that which is the original of well-nigh all objections to miracles. Each conclusion arrived at during the course of our inquiry has rested on an assumption to be verified farther on. Our final conclusion is of the same character, and in like manner rests on an assumption. This assumption it is which furnishes the one remaining ground for sceptical objection.

We have said that Scripture miracles are congruous to the Scripture scheme of revelation, and that being congruous, it is therefore credible that God wrought them; and if it is credible that He wrought them, then they are also credible, both as effects surpassing the power of undirected Natural causes to bring about, and as phenomena contrary to prior human experience. Now here all depends upon one point, namely, that the Scripture scheme of revelation is *itself credible;* in other words, that the teaching concerning God and His relations to man, which miracles are represented as bearing witness to, is such teaching as we can believe to be true. If not, then clearly the congruity of miracles to the revelation of that teaching is no proof of the credibility of God working them; and so the whole chain of argument, link by link, breaks down, and

every difficulty that has been met and put aside springs up again with renewed life and vigour, as formidable as ever. This being so, it would seem as if we must now proceed to discuss in detail the intrinsic credibility of Scripture revelation, as that upon which all the rest depends. For the purpose of the present argument, however, such an inquiry would be altogether out of place. It may seem paradoxical to say so, after the admission just made; but a little consideration will show that the paradox is one merely in appearance.

The point from which we started was, that miracles, being essentially connected with the religion of the Bible, were objected to either as impossibilities, or at all events, as difficulties in the way of receiving that religion; and accordingly that it was through an assault on miracles that the religion was generally attacked. The point at which we have arrived is, that miracles are both credible and congruous, without the slightest difficulty attaching to them, if the revelation with which they are connected is credible. That is to say, the position of the argument at its close is precisely the converse of what it was at the beginning. Then the religion was attacked through miracles; now it appears that miracles can only

be attacked through the religion. Then it was the incredibility of miracles that was to drag down and swamp the religion; now it is the incredibility of the religion that must first of all be called in to confer incredibility on the miracles. But, this being so, it is plain that miracles are not in themselves difficulties in the way of faith; but become such only when the religion is doubted or disbelieved[3]. Now it was precisely the intrinsic difficulties of miracles that it was proposed to discuss, and estimate the worth of. When, therefore, it appears that there are no such difficulties, but that what difficulties there are come wholly from another quarter, the work proposed to be done is manifestly accomplished. To proceed now to discuss the intrinsic credibility of the religion of the Bible, would be to leave miracles altogether, and enter upon an entirely new subject. It is enough to have shown that if objection is to come, it must be from the religion against the miracles, not from the miracles against the religion.

[3] Of course this refers only to miracles viewed as Scripture presents them, *i.e.* as indissolubly connected with religion. If miracles be viewed in an independent aspect, there are no doubt abundant difficulties. But this is exactly the aspect in which we have no right to view them. The discussion of other miracles, which may fairly be so viewed, would be foreign to the present treatise, and is therefore passed over.

But this is not all. The position at which we have arrived points to two further conclusions of great importance.

First, it shows that all the sceptical assaults on the Bible and its religion made through attacks on miracles are nothing but *reasoning in a circle*. There is no objection raised against miracles which does not rest ultimately upon an objection against the religion, and derive from this its whole validity. One objector attacks miracles as inconsistent with the character of God. We reply that if he will but take a wider view of that character, as depicted in the revelation with which miracles are connected, he will see that no such inconsistency exists. What is his answer? Why, that this view of God's character to which we refer is one which he holds to be *untrue*. And this objection to the revelation it is, which gives the whole force and basis to his objection against miracles. Another attacks miracles as inconsistent with Natural law. We reply that the reign of law in no way excludes the directive influence of an intelligent will in modifying the results which matter, force, and law would of themselves bring about. Miracles claim to be events arising from such directive influence on the part of the highest

intelligence in the universe. Regard miracles as so occasioned, and all inconsistency with Natural law ceases to exist. What is the objector's reply? He refuses thus to regard them; *i. e.* he refuses to allow that it is even *possible* for miracles to have been thus occasioned. We press him for a reason; why does he refuse this? Here the answer may vary. Some will say that they do not believe in God at all; some that they do not believe He is such an one as would interfere in this way; some that the cause assigned for His interference is one in their opinion unworthy of Him. Every one of which answers is a direct objection to the revelation miracles attest; yet upon which objections the whole validity of the objection to miracles ultimately rests. Strike out the sceptic's reasons for disbelieving God's agency in miracles, and his difficulties about their causation are seen to be utterly baseless. In the same way it would be easy to show how the objection against miracles, as phenomena contrary to experience, depends upon a rejection of the special agency and circumstances with which Scripture connects them. And so with every other diverse form of sceptical objection; inquire into it but a little; trace it back to its real basis; and in each case the

same result will ensue—it will be found to rest in the end upon some disbelief in the revelation. Now, if there are reasons for disbelieving the Divinity of the religion of the Bible, such as should discredit the miracles alleged to have been connected with it, by all means let these be brought forward. But let not the difficulties which, if these reasons were valid, would attach to miracles, be urged as if they formed a *new* reason for discrediting the religion; since they are really nothing but results of the old reasons, and have no independent value. Still less let the real reasons be kept out of sight, and these mere inferences from them be paraded as if they were objections standing on their own merits. It is not said, be it observed, that this is done intentionally. Long familiarity with the standpoint of disbelief, and with the difficulties which miracles present when viewed from thence, has doubtless in many cases so confused the sense of the true relation which these bear to each other, that cause is mistaken for effect, and consequence for reason. The sceptic may hence honestly think his arguments against miracles independent and unbiassed. But, as we have seen, it needs but to probe the matter somewhat more deeply, and each one is

found to rest upon just such items of disbelief (if not indeed more far-reaching ones) as the objections against miracles are urged to establish; and thus the whole reasoning is shown to be nothing better than reasoning in a circle, the point to be proved being in fact assumed in the premises.

But, secondly, we see here also where it is that the sceptical feeling in regard to miracles really springs from. Difficulties as to miracles are not the first stages of disbelief, probably in any case; but are preceded by doubts or difficulties of quite another kind. This is so even in the extreme case of those who, without positively discrediting miracles, yet feel them to be things hard to believe. It may seem to such that their difficulty arises solely from some inconsistency of miracles with experience or with Nature. But let them look a little deeper, and they will soon perceive that the real root of the difficulty is not there, but that it consists in a lack of faith in God as the Author of the religion and the Worker of the miracles. God's action is not realized, and of course the results of that action appear difficult. There is the germ of the scepticism as to the religion underneath, out of sight; and therefore miracles appear hard of credence. In others the germ

is more developed; it is not merely that God's action is not realized, but it is positively doubted of, and of course miracles at once appear equally dubious. Or if God's action be actually denied, then miracles are incredible. Nor is it merely doubts as to God's agency which thus give rise to scepticism as to miracles, though this is doubtless the commonest case. It may be some difficulty as to the purpose of miracles, or the truths which they profess to bear witness to, which constitutes the ultimate cause of disbelief. The doubt may be intellectual, or moral; it may concern the fact of revelation, or the matter of it; the doctrines taught, or the precepts laid down. But in every case it is the parent of the doubt respecting miracles, not the offspring. The religion of the Bible is not doubted or disbelieved on account of miracles, but miracles are doubted or disbelieved because of some prior doubt or disbelief as to the religion.

But it will be said, how, if this be the case, can miracles be evidences of the truth of the religion? If no one can believe miracles who does not previously regard the religion as credible, are they not useless?—for why should not the religion be accepted on its own merits without them? Nay, is not this an instance

of that very reasoning in a circle which has just been condemned on the other side? Do you not in fact assume the truth of the religion in the first instance, and then, viewing miracles from this standpoint, prove them to be credible; which credibility is afterwards urged as evidence for the truth of the religion, really assumed at starting? The solution of this difficulty consists in two facts of cardinal importance, which will serve to complete the view of the value and functions of miracles to which the preceding argument has been gradually working up.

1st. We are not asked to believe in miracles merely because they are credible, but because they actually occurred. Their credibility, as here regarded, is nothing more than a necessary condition of their belief, not in any sense its cause. The Christian, for example, does not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because this is a phenomenon which he has no experience capable of contravening, or because it is an effect which he regards Divine agency as quite sufficient to account for, or even because it is an event most congruous to a scheme of revelation in his eyes well worthy of God to have given, an event calculated both to accredit the messenger and enforce and illus-

trate the message,—but he believes it because there is such and such evidence that it actually took place. This is the real reason for his faith; all the rest are merely considerations to confirm this positive evidence, by removing difficulties and refuting possible objections; preliminary conditions requisite to faith, but not its real cause. And so with all other miracles. All that the establishment of their credibility does is to clear the way for the reception of the proper evidence in regard to them; to remove the difficulties which would otherwise have prevented *testimony* from being heard. If they do not stand the preliminary test of credibility; then, as we simply cannot believe them, testimony is of no use. But if they do stand the test, and are credible, then we *may* believe them; there is no reason why we should not; and in fact we ought to do so *if* the direct evidence in their favour is sufficient. Though, therefore, we cannot believe miracles to have occurred unless we regard the religion with which they are connected as credible, yet we are not asked to believe miracles *because* the religion is credible, but because there is such and such evidence for their actual occurrence, the credibility of the religion merely setting aside any objections that might be raised to

the reception of this evidence. In a word, the relation of miracles to a credible religion is a purely negative criterion of their truth. The positive grounds of belief come from another quarter, altogether independent of this. And hence it is no reasoning in a circle to say that a recognition of such credibility must precede the recognition of miracles as true.

2nd. For the establishment of this preliminary credibility of miracles it is not required that the religion should be credited, but only be regarded as credible, *i. e.* of such a character as may possibly be true. If the opposite were the case, and we must believe the religion before we could believe the miracles, then although there would be no reasoning in a circle, yet miracles would seem so comparatively useless as to shake their credibility not a little. But nothing of the kind is required. All we need to admit is that the religion is one which might conceivably have come from God, and therefore one which appropriate testimony might establish to be true;—again a purely negative criterion, equivalent to saying that we see no fatal objection to its Divinity[4]. To

[4] It is to be observed that this is the sense in which the word "credible" is used throughout the whole of the present work. Nowhere is it used to denote what actually is, or necessarily ought to be, believed; but every where that to

pass from this mere admission of possible truth to the belief that the religion really *is* true, is an enormous step, to accomplish which is the design of miracles.

How is it that they do this? They accompany revelation, sometimes slightly preceding it, sometimes following it, oftenest going side by side with it. Thus accompanying it, their first office is by their extraordinary character to call attention to it; which we may call their function as "marvels."

But the observer or hearer is not only startled by their strangeness, but is led to wonder how such things come about. The natural thought in most men's minds is that of some supernatural agency, the ordinary course of Nature being plainly insufficient to account for them. Or if this thought does not spontaneously occur, it is speedily supplied by the messenger whom the miracles accompany; and then the miracles confirm the thought. To suggest or confirm this idea of supernatural agency, we may call their function as "mighty works."

But now what supernatural agency? They

which no sufficient objection exists why it should not be believed. Just as "incredible" signifies "impossible to believe," so "credible" signifies "possible to believe," and nothing more.

claim to be works of God, wrought in attestation of a revelation of Himself to men. If this be admitted, then their great and final office is fulfilled also—their function as "signs."

But upon what will this admission depend? It will depend (other things being equal) upon the willingness or unwillingness of those who observe or hear about the miracles to believe that such a revelation could come from God. If men find the revelation opposed to their preconceived notions, as postulating the existence of a God, which they do not believe; or as postulating the existence of human souls, which they do not believe; or as asserting certain attributes of God, or relations of Him to men, which they do not believe (*i. e.* in each case do not believe to be *possible*); then they reject the significance of the miracles, and their evidence is unavailing. Or, again, if men find the revelation distasteful to them, as requiring them to admit things about themselves which they are loath to admit; or as requiring them to adopt a mode of life which they dislike adopting; then also they are likely to reject the miracles. Or, lastly, if men feel no desire for any of that knowledge which the revelation brings, no want of any thing which the revelation offers; then, too, they will probably, from

sheer indifference, reject the miracles; at all events, their evidence will be utterly without effect. In all these cases miracles can prove nothing. On the other hand if there are no such intellectual or moral objections to the revelation; and if there *is* the desire for knowledge and the felt want of help; then the significance of miracles will be accepted, and they will be received as evidence that the revelation is indeed from God. We say "other things being equal," for of course if the evidence of the fact of occurrence be weak or defective, those most prepared and willing to receive the revelation may doubt or disbelieve it as much as the most unwilling and incredulous.

It would seem, then, that the evidential value miracles is ultimately to prove to those who are prepared to receive the revelation, that the revelation is worthy of reception; and to leave those who object to it as incredible unconvinced in their incredulity. And so far as the direct evidence of miracles is concerned, this is all that they can do. Indirectly, however, they may do more. He who denies the significance of miracles cannot stop there. He must besides deny either their supernatural character or their occurrence; he must either say that they are facts within the ordinary

course of Nature, *i. e.* deny them as "mighty works;" or he must say that no such facts occurred at all, *i. e.* deny them as "marvels." Now on the first alternative he is at once brought into collision with physical science, which refuses to allow that Scripture miracles could have occurred as part of the ordinary course of Nature. This accordingly is a position which few sceptics, certainly no enlightened ones, choose to adopt. They prefer the other one, that no such facts ever occurred at all; that is, that the accounts of them are either simple falsehoods, or myths embodying certain ideas, or legendary and exaggerated stories of other facts which did occur. In either case the sceptic is brought face to face with the varied mass of evidence which concentrates its testimony on their actual occurrence (see pp. 16—20). All this evidence must be gainsaid and overthrown if the occurrence of Scripture miracles is denied. Now it may well be that the consideration of the difficulties thus involved in disbelief may lead a man to weigh again the difficulties on his side which led to disbelief. He may perceive that the former are really greater than the latter; that it is easier to regard his pre-conceptions as wrong, his antipathies as mistaken, his indif-

ference as ignorant, than to regard such an accumulated weight of testimony as false. And so he may be led, as many doubtless have been led, to renounce his objections to the revelation, to accept the significance of miracles, and to believe that both miracles and revelation are from God. But this is clearly not the work of miracles as such; they have not convinced him, and from the nature of the case never could. They have only led him indirectly to re-examine the grounds of his former unbelief, and to find them insufficient. Then, and not till then, do miracles come into play directly, the obstacles to their action being now removed.

The position of miracles towards the religion of the Bible is, then, on the whole briefly this: —They are the focus to which all the various lines of evidence external and internal converge on the one hand, and from which all the truths of revelation spread out on the other. Whatever testimony there is on behalf of the religion to be obtained from any quarter is in effect a testimony to miracles. Whatever that religion has to teach us, which we knew not before, comes to us through miracles. They are the meeting-place of the human and Natural, and the Divine; the link between heaven and earth. And they are such a link as brings the question

of belief to a clear and precise issue, making every man who looks them full in the face decide definitely whether he will accept the religion or not. To those who are open to receive such a religion, and desire what it offers, miracles establish its truth beyond dispute. To those who are prejudiced against it, or indifferent, they do but call up in stronger force, because in clearer form, the objections which make them disbelieve or doubt it. Some of these, being made to see what their objections really are, and how weighty a conclusion they are called upon to bear, may thus be led to perceive their futility and renounce them. Others are only confirmed in them more strongly. In each case, directly or indirectly, miracles are the turning-point of faith. They are, as Moses aptly calls them, the great "temptations" or "testings" of God.

All Israel had the same miraculous evidence set before them, the same wondrous acts, the the same proofs of a strong arm working on their behalf, the same signs. But how different was the effect on them[5]. In some these signs wrought faith in God and obedience to His servant; in others they did but serve to bring out into greater prominence their

[5] Comp. 1 Cor. x. 1—5.

disbelief and rebellion. What is said especially of the healing of the waters of Marah and the manna (Exod. xv. 25, 26; xvi. 4), was true of all the miracles (as well as the privations) of the Exodus,—they were to "try" the people, to "prove" them, to "see what was in their hearts" (Deut. iv. 34, vii. 19, viii. 2—4. 16, xxix. 2, 3). And as it was in Moses' days, so it was in Christ's; the "signs" which led some to faith, did but aggravate the unbelief and sin of others (John ii. 11, 23, iii. 2, x. 25, xi. 47, 48, xii. 37, xv. 24). And so it doubtless will be with miracles, and their effects on men's minds, to the end of time.

There are some who will cavil at such evidences as these, and say that if God gave a revelation at all it ought to be such as would commend itself to every man alike, and leave no room for doubt. But even supposing that we had a right (which we have not) thus to infer God's actions from our conceptions of what was fit for Him to do; the question might still be asked,—how could this have been? So diverse are men that on almost every subject, with whatever evidence you like to bring, some will be found who will not be convinced. Certainly such diversity exists in

all matters connected with religion, be that religion what it may. Except, therefore, God were to go so far as to compel men to believe, there could be (so far as we can see) no evidence given which should ensure the faith of all. But such compulsion would be to reduce men to the level of mere machines, without intelligence or will. Not such as these would God have for His servants, but those who entered His service from free, rational choice. Therefore the evidence which He gave was such as allowed, nay courted, such rational choice; sufficient to convince any one willing to be convinced, insufficient to compel the unwilling; enough, wherever germs of religious faith existed, to strengthen and develope it and make it reasonable, not enough to evoke it afresh where previous voluntary action had crushed it out of being. The minimum of faith required thus beforehand is very small,—only to believe that God is, and that man needs to know Him and be helped by Him. Both are points which Nature and man's own mind are fully capable of informing him upon without the slightest aid from revelation. Is it unreasonable that man should be required first to learn the common lessons which his own conscience and reason can teach him, ere any special revelation

is vouchsafed to him? Is it unjust that the eyes should be required to be opened before God pours in the light, or the ears made attentive before He begins to speak? Must He force open men's eyes against their will, or pull their fingers from their ears when they have stopped them of their own accord? "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given," is the principle of the whole world's order, and it is the principle of miracles.

This, then, is the final answer to our question, "Can we believe in miracles?"

We *can* believe in them, if there be in us the bare rudiments of religious faith, such as Nature and our own selves instruct us in; if we have learnt the alphabet of religion, and are willing to learn more. Then the message is plain to us, for it is written in characters that we already know, and whose import we cannot fail to perceive.

We *cannot* believe in them, if the witness of Nature and ourselves has been neglected or set aside, or if having it we proudly refuse to admit that it is only the alphabet, and the real message is yet to come. Then all is enigmatical, full of difficulties and stumbling-blocks. But the difficulties are altogether of our own making.

Whether, if the former answer be ours, we proceed farther, and say that we *ought* to believe in miracles, depends upon the balance of testimony in regard to the particular miracles in question; a department of the subject with which the present argument is not concerned. Its object has been simply to examine what are the *à priori* difficulties in the way of belief, and what they are worth. And if in respect to these it has convinced any that they are not of the insuperable character often asserted, or if it has merely led them to see where it is that these difficulties really come from, and so induced a more careful weighing of their validity, its object will have been fully accomplished.

THE END.

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